Film Quarterly

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LOVE AND MONEY

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CITY OF WOMEN

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EIGHT AND A LAUGH

WINTER 1980-81

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Editor's Notebook

SHORTER REVIEWS

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GIDEON BACHMANN

Federico Fellini: "The Cinema Seen as a Woman..."

AN INTERVIEW ON THE DAY "CITY OF WOMEN" PREMIERED IN ROME

BACHMAN: *I think that somewhere along the line I shall have to thank you for talking to me, because from what you've often said, you don't exactly seem to love journalists. But I want you to know that my thanks extend beyond journalism, because, as you will have noted, we are not really doing an interview. I am just blatantly using you to clarify some ideas, and what I am thanking you for is your ability to go beyond cinema and your work and those things that most journalists would be interested in, and allowing me to rip the cover off what seem to me to be the real problems of the day: the disappearance of human warmth and values.*

FELLINI: I have never said that I don't like journalists, because in a funny way I envy you. You are protected by your profession. Being a journalist these days is the only remaining profession that rewards you, psychologically, with a defense against the decline. You are a witness. The worse the thing is which you witness, the more it gratifies your vocation. You are the witness of horror. And it is your testimony which is exalted. You become the important witness of horrible events. This is true especially when the matter witnessed is inhuman, destructive. Being a journalist sometimes seems to me to be the only profession our times allow.

Mind you, I am saying this from a psychological point of view. Realizing oneself through the act of witnessing events as calamitous, in times as disturbing, as debunking and as decadent as ours, being a journalist is still a way of living, of feeling oneself protected, by one's own mission, one's own vocation. You are stronger, because you become a stranger, you do not participate, you witness. You don't have the time to get involved, and you have a great alibi, too: telling it to the others. Intimately and profoundly your engagement remains minimal. It's almost like being an actor, living fictitious, fleeting lives. Preserving an adolescent dimension, they live longer. At 90 years of age, they put on make-up to appear "old." Something protective derives from dissociation, it is a schizoid phenomenon. And journalists, I sometimes feel, are also a bit like that.

Was that your feeling when you yourself were working for newspapers? And isn't film-making a form of witnessing? It seems to me that your recent films are very strong in this respect, more than ever there is an engagement in them.

I am not saying that an artist is not somewhat the same. He, too, is a witness. He just doesn't exercise it so directly, so painlessly as a journalist. There is greater engagement because that which is witnessed is lived at more intense levels, more profound, sometimes mythical levels. One interprets, not just witnesses. But a creator, too, is protected in times of tempest, in times of mourning. It all becomes ascetic, painless, through the interpretation needed for expressing it. Expression is a filter of a providential, protective sort, through which all passes: emotions, shocks, anger, fears, defeat, love, tenderness, ideologies, absorbing some of the pain. Other small dramas take up some of the slack: the drama of *how* to express, *how* to communicate. Thus your problems with reality, with sentiments, the problem of being, after all, just a weak, human creature and a small cog in society, suddenly turn into aesthetic prob-

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lems. A sort of transference, delegating and burdening it all onto the back of another preoccupation, creates a new way of living it, an expressive way, which keeps you, to some degree, from being hurt. The sieve of expression redimensions the drama.

All this concerns your relationship to the work. What happens later, in the relationship between the work and those who see it? Can't they feel that there is this sieve, and be less involved because of it?

I have a curious lack of engagement with this second part of my work's life. Not because I do not feel concerned with it, so much, after it is finished (as I often say), and certainly not out of indifference, but this after-life, the public life of my films, is not really within my knowledge. The making of it absorbs all my energies; making a film, besides all the creative problems which all artists have, involves you in a social endeavor. You are not just a creator but also a commander, you're at the top of a pyramid. Making a film is a metaphor for a type of social utopia: all together doing a thing, directed by one, but for the good of a cause . . .

And all of you protected by the endeavor from the problems of reality?

Protected by the myth of it. Being involved in realizing a dream. It is the same as a group working on a scientific problem and solving it or involved in geographical research and discovering a new continent, or the more common ideal of inventing and materializing a social form, working out a philosophical problem or creating a work of art. The myth of realization protects by involving you in something bigger than yourself: the aim, the achievement of a goal.

Since most achieved goals fall apart quickly,

man seems to care more about the process of achieving them than about the goals themselves.

Certainly, but I don't think this is conscious. We are educated to produce, to judge by the achieved, and this causes our unhappiness. If we stopped working for a goal and started working for the sake of work, we might get closer to some form of psychic health. Our functional education claims there is an achievement out there which needs to be reached, but of course there isn't. All there is, is the trip of going out there. That is probably the main reason why I do not like to talk about the films I have already made, or about their after-life. It's not so much the questions about the past, about things I have put behind me, but I have a feeling that concern with my past work holds me back, keeps me from continuing the trip beyond the oasis. After all, what have I come here to do? Just to take a short rest, find some water. But one doesn't stop at an oasis. What is there to do? I want to go on, keep going. You know yourself the meaning of the caravan . . .

I have often talked about the moment, usually occurring sometime during the final mixing, when I suddenly feel the film has become autonomous. Birth (sorry to sound banal and romantic!) has occurred, and although I may still be sitting there like an octopus with my arms extended across all the levers of the volume controls, in order to give the child its final push and life's breath, giving it the heartbeat like Frankenstein sucking up stellar energy, and despite the fact that I still identify with it completely in all its molecules, I now feel it plopping out of me, inexorably and forever. The life-giving has now occurred.

Then there comes this moment of perception, of clarity: you have done your best, have protected it, wanted it, guided it, controlled all its details, given it everything of yourself, programming its minutest elements, leaving nothing to chance, and suddenly it gets away from you. It is breathing on its own now. And from that moment on I feel no particular relation to it, no father-feeling. From this moment the life of this creature, this friend, this monster, this approximate form of life, interests me only little.

I would be lying to you if I said that I don't care how well it does outside, whether it makes its way, meeting friends, or what. It pleases me of course if it arouses sympathies. I prefer for it to walk than to collapse. But I no longer feel linked to it. This makes it hard for me to talk about it and to comment on it. It seems vaguely indecent to me to do so. And just because I am the one who made it, I don't have the feeling that I am really authorized to discuss it. Somehow at that point I feel I know it less well than others do.

What a pity mothers don't usually have this kind of respect for their creations. We might have a world with more autonomous men in it, less achievement-oriented.

Pure Hassidic wisdom . . . Today there are too many of us. That in itself makes us competitive and achievement-oriented. The profoundly religious relationship to life was possible when we lived in small tribes, in natural conditions. But what has happened has happened, man can never go back. Maybe some new forms of knowledge, systems of life lived in small groups, can be undertaken, but it seems to me that most people are not even interested in knowing, in changing, and in being involved in research. I realize more and more that the things that disturb us profoundly, that fill our being and cause obscure nostalgia in us, most people are ignorant of, and they want to stay that way. They don't want to be shaken up, trying to get them to listen is bothersome to them. You become a disturber of the peace, a bore.

The small tribe, living, as you say, in natural conditions, resembles the film crew, joined together by a common cause, and not shunning knowledge and involvement. The road from the breaking up of the tribe, via the left-over "tribe" called family, to the reductio-ad-absurdum of feminism, which is surely the last straw in the destruction of tribal bonds, seems to me to have been, in fact, the theme and common cause of your current film crew, in the making of City of Women, *which shows what happens when these bonds are destroyed. The autonomization of the sexes, which in nature has never existed, is shown in your film to be a deadend street. Was that your intention in making it, to show this danger?*

I am very pleased by the fact that you see the film in this key. Making a film about a problem and not giving an answer to it—as obviously no artist can, especially in the cinema—makes the public always a bit uneasy. They expect some sort of resolution. They all seek certainty. And this search often keeps them from seeing the film for

what it is, for what its maker intended. We want others to provide slogans, ideology translated into pills, to be taken with the meal. It has become bothersome to use one's own head, tiresome to measure and weigh one's own life all the time. And recently it has been called indecent to be concerned with the private sphere, we are forced to think of classes and groups. . . . the annulment of the individual. . . . Look at the cult of youth: once the old had the respect of the tribe owing to their knowledge and experience, having overcome the years of fervor of instinct and the ferment of the blood, and they had an equilibrating influence. Today the old are regarded as being useless, especially in countries of development. It happens a little less in capitalist societies that have found maturity. Take England, where a man removed from productivity and strife can still find himself in controlling positions, at least not killed off at 65.

Why do you think I have chosen England to live?

Is that a question or an answer? I guess we are all seeking refuge from the world's decline; some in work and some in moving . . . so you are leaving Rome?

Well, I still have my apartment at the Pantheon, but I come here less and less. In the summer, especially, the noise and the rowdiness of the people make it impossible. What bothers me most, is the growing lack of respect people have for each other and for traditions, ideas, values and emotions. It gets to the point where even saying this puts you in a category to be derided. And one other thing I find hard to take: approximation and the lack of originality. Nobody does anything beyond the minimum necessary and nobody has any new thinking to offer. But I don't think Rome is unique in this respect . . . I see you nodding: may I say then, that your film is about this, about the decline of values and the disappearance of the human dimension in modern life? About the end of togetherness?

Certainly. And I am pleased that you suggest such a moving and at the same time alarming point of view. Because that is, in fact, how things really are. But at the same time I don't want the impression abroad that I made the film as a political platform. As you know, I have always refused this, because it seemed to me to be very limiting. I did not consider it right that my inclination to tell stories, my work in life, should be circumscribed by such a definition. But if by "political" we mean the demystification of the non-authentic, the unmasking of lies, the support of the plurality of ideas, the refusal of rigid viewpoints, the respect for the liberty of others, the understanding that your liberty ends where that of another person begins, then I would say that all my films have been and are political.

In previous ones, in the end, there was always a sort of mystical acceptance of the horror of his existence by the protagonist. The films didn't have real endings but projected hope for the idea of life. And there was a sense of equilibrium between the body of the film and its human drama on the one hand, and the end, a sort of religious hope for man. In this film, it seems to me, the scales are more weighed on the side of horror.

In the end of *City of Women* the protagonist consciously accepts the fact that he is dreaming. Waking up in the train, and deciding to go back to sleep because reality is beginning to become upsetting again (he sees his wife in the seat previously occupied by the feminist, the feminist has become a sort of courtesan, the two terrorist soubrettes turn out to be student girls), he accepts to go back into the tunnel with the knowledge that he now has made a contact with his inner, profound, mythical being. This time he will dream because he is deciding to dream. It will be a vigilant dream, full of attention for the profound, a witnessing dream. He goes back consciously into the dream in order to have a more lucid contact with himself. Lucid and fascinated at the same time, passionate and yet with a sense of distance. Intentionally without intention—a phrase, I think, taken from the Tao or some Hassidic book, but I don't want to sound stupidly philosophic—he decides to continue his trip but with his eyes open upon the dream. In fact, the very last shot of the film, at the very end after the titles, which come up as the train is in the tunnel again, there are a few frames in which an opening, a far wink of light shows in the dark. The exit from the night of the tunnel. It is only 20 frames and the sound has abated by then, so I hope the projectionists of the world will not cut off my delicate hint (but I have not much hope for this) nor people get up to leave too early.

So there is hope?

Not exactly. Hope is a lugubrious word. I prefer

to speak of faith. Since I am here, I must be having faith of some sort. In the film, the train doesn't come out of the tunnel, but there is that remote suggestion of light. How could one not have faith of some sort? After all, since I know nothing, Gideon, since we do not know why we are here . . . (this is getting to be the kind of talk that the *Vitelloni* used to engage in at one o'clock in the morning in their provincial café) . . . Faith derives from accepting the fact of one's total ignorance . . .

Faith in mankind?

Faith in oneself.

Faith in your work?

Don't you have it yourself? Here you are, interviewing me—don't you have faith in what you are doing?

Not much. Partially it is a living, and partially an alibi. And only very deep down, in some remote part of myself, I believe that somewhere, somehow, somebody is actually going to read this and derive some benefit from it. Maybe two or three people, maybe a few more. But certainly not the masses. Making a film would be suicidal with this attitude, so I presume your faith goes further.

But this is what faith is. To do something you believe in, in whatever way you normally do it. To do something that is yourself. To know that someone will read what you are doing now, will have an impression of the relationship you have with your friend Federico, of the thing you are creating that represents him and that represents yourself—the wish to say it, to write it, that is faith. And maybe we should feel some sort of joy, in a funny way, to be witnesses to what is happening around us.

Where the women take Mastroianni to court in City of Women, *he is asked: "Why did you choose to be born male?" Perhaps I could ask you: why did you choose to be born today? Not having had a choice in the matter would be the answer in both cases, but does that in itself impose a "making the best of it" attitude? In any case, faith in the doing doesn't necessarily mean faith in the utility of it.*

Well, what is there to do? What can anyone do? Concentrate on oneself, not in order to exclude relationships with others, but because only in yourself, in the end, can you find a meaning for your life, doing that which you know how to do, trying to defend it from all doubts and paralyzing perplexities, from all discomforts. Not being, by vocation, a revolutionary, this becomes my real revolution. To propose this view, it seems to me, is the most revolutionary approach. The only thing I can suggest, anyway. I cannot fail to believe in what I do. Even though I see that it is becoming ever more difficult to do it, even though I do, at times, feel ridiculous to demand the attention of a hundred persons, who, at my command, work to establish a certain, particular ray of light to illuminate the blond head of a woman, with that particular precision . . . but if I did not believe in this madness, in this mad insistence on detail, in this rigor, and if I did not demand of others to share this madness, then indeed I would disintegrate totally. This is my way of having faith in myself, and thus in what I do. One is forced to recognize, at the same time, one's own limits, and to learn how to act within them. And these are my limits. Beyond this, I make no pretense.

And beyond the cinema?

It appears to me that I have few interests beyond this thing. This container, this framework, which at times may appear to be suffocating and make you feel vaguely un-topical, provides a discipline and clarifies your limits, and by limits I do not mean the prison-aspect of stopping your movements but the energy-producing need to stay within a prescribed, creative stance. Only he who is in prison can talk of liberty in a really moving and emotional way. The creative act needs restraints, requires a certain kind of bondage, of chains. These are the indispensable ingredients for the growth of the dream, the tension, the utopia, and for making it possible to feel one's way with secure intuition into other states of consciousness and into other dimensions. I am sure that in human history artists have always felt this.

It seems to me that you are more optimistic about yourself than your work indicates. That is, inasmuch as I identify you, perhaps unjustly, with what City of Women *says.*

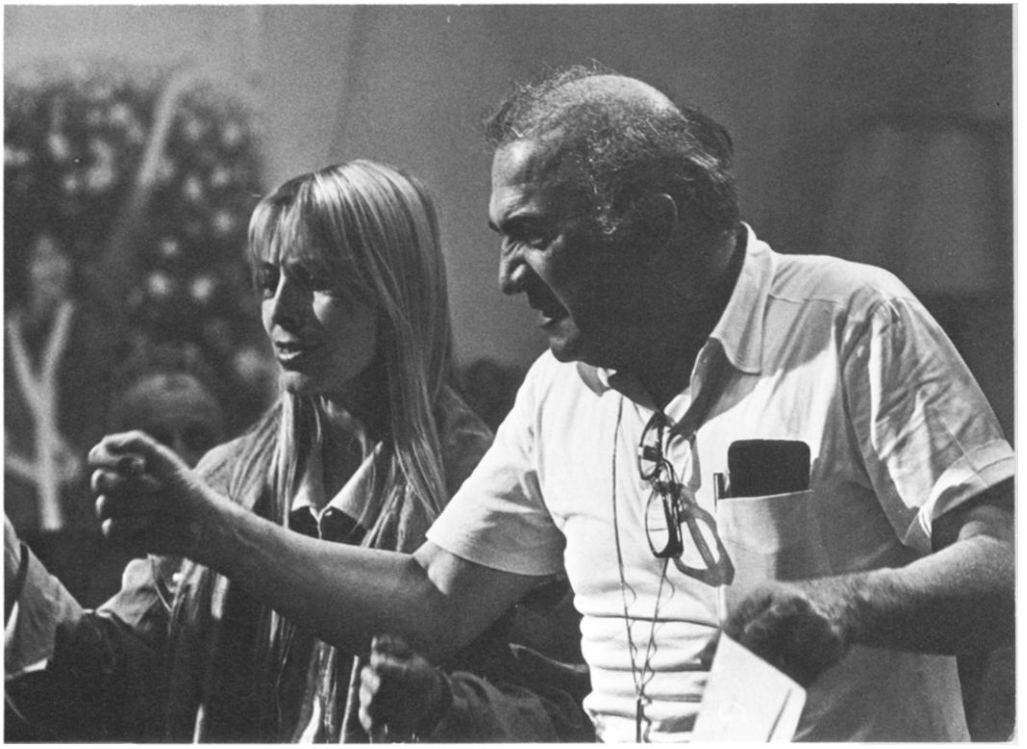
It must be like that. You have to put together this immense facade, the mechanism of the film, and you have to be able to project an immense enthusiasm. Optimism and faith must be exuded to give you the force to involve others. But in any case, I do not consider myself a pessimist, nor do I really think that in the film pessimism is the final message. Not even ideologically, because *City of Women*, within the modest framework of

the tale that is told here, ends with the decision by the protagonist that it is worthwhile to continue the voyage, after he has gone through this upsetting dream made up of tenderness and horror. He is going on with the others, deciding that he will remain involved with them and with his inner soul, to see what could be derived from a last attempt of this kind. And the fact that the body of the film, the dream, seems pessimistic, is partially due to stupidly superficial optimistic expectations. If you approach it expecting to be comforted by illusions of a sentimental or ideological kind or by a simplistic and slightly obtuse vision of life, obviously you will be disappointed by the viewpoints presented. I just don't think that the word "pessimistic" can properly define him who tries to give you a new view on things. I think it is important to change one's position and focal length from time to time, see things from other angles. Even if this shocks or creates earthquakes in the mind of those who need security, cover, frameworks and roofs.

I think that for those who look upon life as a trip and who understand that there is both a plurality and a simultaneousness of viewpoints and levels of comprehension, this should be obvious. He who gives us, through the example of his life or by the expression of his thought and his fantasy, a new view, helping us to pull our concepts out from under that dusty, dim light and out of that small, rational cage of intellect which imprisoned them and kept them from becoming individually significant for us, robbing us, perhaps, briefly, of the consolation of the familiar, of the daily dreariness, and giving back to them a more mysterious meaning, of a less predictable sort—I do not think that such a man should be accused of being pessimistic. He is, instead, a realist.

Now that the film is finished and has been projected to selected audiences, what is your reaction to their reaction? Have you found, on the whole, that they seek the consolation of the familiar or are they open to the mysteriousness of the multiple meanings?

I have not really followed the screenings with attention, but a certain tension seems to linger among the critics after they see it. At a special screening for young people, in Rome, I am told, many came out looking somewhat perplexed. And some women were angry. It seems to me that



Fellini directing CITY OF WOMEN *(Photos in this article by Deborah Imogen Beer)*

people don't sufficiently abandon themselves to just following the fable of the film. After all, that's all I have tried to make, a fable, like something told by one friend to others, some night after dinner.

Not being able to abandon themselves to the fable, it seems to me people don't see, either, that *City of Women* is really a film about the cinema, about the cinema seen as a woman, the cinema seen through its femininity, through the masturbatory discovery of its feminity. And I don't mean because of the scene where 20 boys on an enormous bed masturbate watching a film, but I mean the whole of the film, the way it is expressed, the things quoted in it in a hidden way, and again I don't just mean the quotes from the history of the cinema.

The film tries to make its way as a simple afternoon spectacle, of the kind we used to go and see in the Italian provinces in the afternoons of the thirties, or (to repeat something that seems to make little sense now) as a circus performance. A fable that needs not to be "understood"; after all, what is there to be understood? The film consists of a series of "numbers," like circus numbers, of which some will make you sad, some happy, some will leave you cold. It is conceived as an homage to the cinema, not as a competitor among its works.

What do you mean by the cinema seen as a woman?

I think the cinema is a woman by virtue of its ritualistic nature. This uterus which is the theater, the fetal darkness, the apparitions—all create a projected relationship, we project ourselves onto it, we become involved in a series of vicarious transpositions, and we make the screen assume the character of what we expect of it, just as we do with women, upon whom we impose ourselves. Woman being a series of projections invented by man. In history, she became our dream image.

Thus when the terrorist girl in the end of City of Women *shoots down the great hot air balloon which is womanhood, she is also shooting down the cinema?*

Except that the girl—that is also him, Marcello. The film is really a dream, and as in a dream everything is the dreamer.

An Adlerian idea of Gestalt-psychology? Everything you dream is you?

Actually I think it was an idea that had a certain currency 2000 years ago . . . Anyway, when Marcello-Snaporaz projects and invents, for the millionth time, a new liberation, a new incarnation of femininity seen as a madonna, as a wife, as a soubrette, as a balloon that carries him away from reality and he flies away with her, happy, into space, forgetting everything, his imagination carried away by this great behind, these breasts, this madonna-like smile with the lights of the procession in its halo, another part of him, another flicker of his consciousness, fearing that all this is just an inflated dream, shoots it down. It's his other self, terrorized, and thus it is a terrorist who kills the dream. But it is him, really, who does the shooting, one of his states of consciousness. Feeling that he has allowed himself to become victim to a dream of too puerile and too childish a nature, that he has disclaimed too much responsibility . . . But this other self turns out to be just as irresponsible, being full of moralizing rigors, of fears. The ones who shoot usually shoot out of fear. Anyway, he precipitates earthward, again hoping to be saved by another female figure, but he wakes up, back in the train, only that his glasses, which he had broken in the dream, are really broken now . . .

So Snaporaz is also all the women he dreams in the film, and the film, as we said in our first encounter, is not really a film about women but a film about man. Or a film about one man.

A film about one man, a man who invents woman. She is his metaphor, his obscurity, the part of himself he doesn't know, and about which he feels a fatal necessity to create ever new hypotheses. He seeks himself through woman. Or he seeks the part in himself which is woman. But it is clear that he knows nothing about women, he isn't able to creat in his imagination/film a single outstanding, real person, which is why the film has no real female protagonists. There are just thousands of faces, of mouths, of smiles, of looks, of voices. My feminist critics are even now saying that in the whole film there isn't one real woman. Of course there isn't. There wasn't meant to be. Because if there was a real woman, it would have been useless to make the film.

How can he recognize her, anyway, being in her middle? He is at her center. Woman has

become everything for him: sky, earth, water, landscape . . . it's him, woman. So how can he see her? That is the story of the film. The story of a voyage seeking for something that can never be met because you are in it. And, what's more, he doesn't want to come out of it, for profound reasons of his own. In fact, the end itself, if I wanted to apply a cheap form of symbolism, could be seen in this key: the tunnel, the uterus, and the train, the rigid thing, which wishes to enter but is instead sucked up by it . . .

In all accounts of reincarnation the people telling of their being "reborn" invariably describe the act of it as coming out through a long, dark tunnel, and how painful the outside is, how unwillingly they are forced through the channel, almost like a punishment. There is opposition to recognizing the world, just in the same manner you describe: the protagonist's inability to perceive that which he is too much in the middle of. Now if we take your equation of cinema—woman—world, your film, in a way, becomes a metaphor for our not taking cognizance of our world as a result of being too much inside of it. "The world is too much with us . . ." Is that an interpretation of City of Women *which you could accept?*

Decidedly. In fact, I wish you would write these things. How we do not really perceive our own world . . . Said simply, like this, without too much cultural or theosophic suggestivity . . . I myself feel embarrassed to speak of my film in these terms. I am not called upon to discuss my film but to make it. I don't like to come on explaining, why did Pinocchio meet his father in the belly of the whale, why do the cat and the fox hang him, why doesn't he die once hung . . . it makes no sense, all these explanations, and it is stupid, mortifying for the film, covering it with this cage network of interpretations, until it becomes unrecognizable in the end. Unrecognizable even to myself.

Well, we'd better stop talking about it, then.

BRIAN HENDERSON

The Searchers: An American Dilemma

Dedicated to the memory of
James Blue, 1930-1980

In a 1979 article, Stuart Byron surveys the influence of John Ford's film *The Searchers* (1956) on several young directors and screenwriters.[1] "In one way or another," he concludes,"the film relates to Paul Schrader, John Milius, Martin Scorcese, Steven Spielberg, George Lucas, and Michael Cimino; to *Hardcore, Taxi Driver, Close Encounters of the Third Kind, Dillinger, Mean Streets, Big Wednesday, The Deer Hunter, The Wind and the Lion, Ulzana's Raid,* and *Star Wars* . . . When one film obsesses so much talent, it won't do just to call it a cult movie. *The Searchers* is the Super-Cult movie of the New Hollywood."

The film-makers Byron discusses do not hesitate to confirm his argument. Milius: "The best American movie—and its protagonist, Ethan Edwards, is the one classic character in films. I've named my own son Ethan after him. I've seen it 60 times." Schrader: "I make sure I see *The Searchers* at least once a year. God knows that there are movies that are better acted or better written, but *The Searchers* play the fullest artistic hand." "Scorcese and I agree that *The Searchers* is the best American film, a fact that must have influenced *Taxi Driver.*" Scorcese: "The dialogue is like poetry! And the changes of expressions are so subtle, so magnificent! I see it once or twice a year." Spielberg: "*The Searchers* has so many superlatives going for it. It's John Wayne's best performance . . . It's a study in dramatic framing and composition. It contains the single most harrowing moment in any film I've ever seen. It is high on my twenty-favorite-film list." Spielberg says he has seen the film a dozen times, including twice on location with *Close Encounters of the Third Kind.*

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become everything for him: sky, earth, water, landscape . . . it's him, woman. So how can he see her? That is the story of the film. The story of a voyage seeking for something that can never be met because you are in it. And, what's more, he doesn't want to come out of it, for profound reasons of his own. In fact, the end itself, if I wanted to apply a cheap form of symbolism, could be seen in this key: the tunnel, the uterus, and the train, the rigid thing, which wishes to enter but is instead sucked up by it . . .

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spired by *The Searchers: Taxi Driver, Close Encounters of the Third Kind, The Deer Hunter,* and *Hard Core.* In each, "an obsessed man searches for someone—a woman, a child, a best friend—who has fallen into the clutches of an alien people. But when found, the sought one doesn't want to be rescued."

There has been a good deal of writing on *The Searchers,* as film criticism goes. In "Critics on *The Searchers,*" Edward Buscombe summarizes the work of several Ford critics—John Baxter, J. A. Place, Andrew Sarris, Michael Wilmington, and Joseph McBride.

> Despite their sense that the film is concerned with questions of history the critics do not in practice pay much attention to this. What is ultimately of concern is the artistry with which the film organizes the audience's responses to the characters . . . The actual way in which the critics deal with questions of character in the film . . . lead[s] us all the time towards articulating what it is the characters are like, what motivates them, how they understand each other and how they are to be understood by us . . . All these critics, then, to some extent treat the film as though it were a psychological novel.[2]

What Buscombe does not say, perhaps because it is obvious, is that critics of *The Searchers* have been notably focussed on one character in particular, Ethan Edwards. Indeed, preoccupation with Ethan and his motives has been a constant of commentary on the film since it first appeared. Lindsay Anderson, who did not like the film, was as centered on the character of Ethan as those later critics who esteem it supremely.

> *The Searchers* begins with a promise . . . yet somehow, curiously, the effect is cold. . . . Lack of intensity in all [its] echoes reminds us that it is not enough just to set Ford down among the mesas . . . he has to have a story—or at least a theme. And the story of *The Searchers* . . . does not turn out to be a good one for him. In the first place there is too much of it. The pictures Ford has himself produced in the last ten years . . . have relied less and less on narrative and more and more on mood.
>
> *The Searchers* is a long and complicated story, spread over eight or nine years. Moreover its hero, Ethan Edwards, is an unmistakable neurotic, devoured by an irrational hatred of Indians and half breeds, shadowed by some mysterious crime. His search for his little niece . . . abducted by Comanches seems . . . inspired less by love or honour than by an obsessive desire to do her to death as a contaminated creature. Now what is Ford, of all directors, to do with a hero like this?[3]

Even one of the trade magazines spoke of a "problem of motivation" in a review that appeared before the film's release.

> The box office appeal of John Wayne combined with the imprint of John Ford makes *The Searchers* a contender for the big money stakes. It's a Western in the grand manner —handsomely mounted and in the tradition of *Shane.* . . . Yet *The Searchers* is somewhat disappointing. . . . Overlong and repetitious at 119 minutes there are subtleties in the basically simple story that are not adequately explained. . . . Wayne, the uncle of the kidnapped girl, is a complex character. His motivations, from the time he appears out of the southwest plains at his brother's ranch to his similar exit after he accomplishes his mission, are unclear. . . . Wayne is a bitter, taciturn individual throughout and the reasons for his attitude are left to the imagination of the viewer. (*Variety,* March 14, 1956)[4]

There is not one point in these passages but several: a centering on Ethan; a centering on Ethan's motives; and finding a problem with Ethan's motives, usually followed by an attempt to solve it. We have not space to sort these out so we treat the "preoccupation with Ethan" as a single thing.

T. S. Eliot has warned against critical fascination with a fascinating character. "Few critics have even admitted that *Hamlet* the play is the primary problem, and Hamlet the character only secondary."[5] Our analysis seeks to focus on *The Searchers* the film, not *The Searchers* the saga of Ethan Edwards. This attempt opposes the weight of prior commentary: it has never been doubted that *The Searchers* concerns the uneasy relations between the restless hero, half-civilized, half-savage, and the community he benefits.

Vladimir Propp counsels that the motivations of characters have nothing to do with the structure of narrative.

> Motivations belong to the most inconstant and unstable elements of the tale. . . . Completely identical or similar acts are motivated in the most varied ways . . . [which] has no influence on the structure of the course of action, i.e., on the search as such. . . . One may observe in general that the feelings and intentions of the dramatic personas do not have an effect on the course of action in any instances at all.[6]

Propp's formulae on motivation hold good for the entire "structural analysis of the narrative" tradition—Lévi-Strauss, Greimas, Todorov, Barthes. Despite his motivational complications, Ethan does function rather conventionally as the hero of *The Searchers* in structural terms. His ambiguous motives do not prevent, they do not even qualify his performance of the hero's functions in the film.*

*There is a Proppian problem in the film's doubled hero: it is Martin who kills Scar, recovers Debbie, and marries Laurie,

Ethan in the homestead: THE SEARCHERS

But *The Searchers* itself foregrounds the problem of Ethan and his motivations through the song that begins and ends the film. The first part of the song is played over the titles, its last words overlapping the figure of Ethan as he slowly approaches his brother's house: "What makes a man to wander? What makes a man to roam? What makes a man to leave bed and board and turn his back on home? Ride away, ride away, ride away." The second part of the song is played at the end of the film over images of the settlers entering the house and Ethan turning away. "A man will search in heart and soul, go searching way out there. His peace of mind he knows he'll find, but where, O Lord, O where? Ride away, ride away, ride away." The first part of the song poses a question that we expect the film to answer. The second part of the song also poses a question, but this time we know that the film will answer neither one. The second question is rhetorical, suggesting that Ethan will not find peace of mind and that his response to this is to ride away. (The second part of the song has another function: it tells us that Ethan *is* riding away, not just going back to feed his horse before going into the house.)

The song that frames *The Searchers* seems to parallel the poem that opens *Young Mr. Lincoln*, itself a series of questions. In the *Cahiers* reading, the main function of the poem is to pretend that its questions haven't been answered yet, whereas the film itself presumes the spectator's knowledge of Lincoln. Through this "feigned indecisiveness" the film effects a naturalization of the Lincoln myth. The function of the song in *The Searchers* is opposite to this. In *Lincoln* the audience knows the answers to the questions before the film begins; in *The Searchers* the audience does not know the answers to the questions even after the film is over.

To displace Ethan from the center of *The Searchers* thus seems to oppose the film itself; but the foregrounding of Ethan and his problems may be read as a ruse of the text (though not of its makers) to deflect attention from more important and hidden matters. This analysis of *The Searchers* seeks to explore different patterns of signification and to use different methods of criticism than prior criticism of the film has done. Of course it is a "reading" of the film, but it does not have the closed or completed quality that the notion of reading suggests; it will be enough if this analysis succeeds in displacing discussion of the film. Its point of departure is the extraordinary power of *The Searchers* as film-myth on a number of filmmakers, critics, and other viewers, a power that might also be defined by the number of intelligent viewers that the film intensely repels. The moral-psychological critics whom Buscombe discusses,

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although arguably he does the first two as Ethan's helper. We deal with this in a separate essay.

who are also thoroughly "author-centered," tend to assume the film's power in a way that precludes raising it as a problem. Insofar as they consider it they attribute the film's impact on audiences to the artistry of its director. But if myth is viewed as a collective phenomenon then the power of a myth can only be explained by reference to the community that responds to it.

This analysis has several methodological inspirations. The first is Lévi-Straussian myth analysis with its Freudian emphasis on the unconscious dimension, and its Marxist emphasis on the materialist interpretation, of collective phenomena. From Lévi-Strauss we take the notion that myths (and other public narratives) have an unconscious component, formed by public conflicts rather than private ones. These are contradictions either in social life or in knowledge; they explain why listeners are stirred by myths and why myths are told again and again. When these conflicts fade in social life, the power of the myth is lessened until it "dies." The myth operates by transposing the terms of the actual conflict into other sets of terms, usually in the form of binary oppositions.* It is the resolution of the transposed oppositions, substituted for the real conflict, that gives the myth a palliative effect. That this effect is a kind of deception accounts for the pejorative sense of the word "mythical," even in Lévi-Strauss. He refuses to budge in calling myth "inauthentic" because it operates to deflect humans from identifying and resolving their actual problems. Finally, the operation of a myth—both its construction from actual conflicts and its impact on audiences—always has to do with the time in which the myth is told, not with the time that it tells of. Thus *The Searchers* has to do with 1956, not with the 1868-1873 period in which it is set.

We also draw upon the *Cahiers du cinéma* analysis of *Young Mr. Lincoln*,[7] which uses Lévi-Strauss, among other sources, but proceeds quite differently. Lévi-Strauss overlooks the text's specific modes of unfolding and elaboration in order to study its structure. *Cahiers* does its Lévi-Straussian and other analyses off-stage, then devotes its analysis to reading them back into the unfolding text. Our analysis also benefits from Charles Eckert's reading of *Marked Woman*,[8] notably its casual but effective combination of Lévi-Straussian method and ideological analysis and its analysis of the gangster as an overdetermined figure of displacement in many films.

The Searchers is explicitly concerned with a number of anthropological issues. On its surface it treats questions of kinship, race, marriage, and the relations between tribes. These questions also have to do with the identity, status, and responsibilities of individuals: Who is responsible for the retrieval and burial of the dead, for the search and recovery of captives, for vengeance? Who can marry whom? Which marriages are binding? Which are not?

The wealth of anthropological material in *The Searchers* is itself a problem: how to proceed? Let us begin with two parallel sets of relationships that appear to structure the film. With ethnographic accuracy, the film designates Martin Pawley as one-eighth Cherokee by descent. As a child Martin was rescued (by Ethan) from an Indian raid that killed his parents; Martha and Aaron Edwards adopted him and raised him as a member of their family. Martin's parents were white settlers like the Edwards but as our analysis will show, he functions as an Indian in the symbolics of the film, more precisely as an Indian who has become an adopted white. Martin marries Laurie Jorgenson, who is white.

Debbie Edwards is captured by Scar and his band when she is ten. She is raised as a Comanche until she reaches puberty, then becomes Scar's

*Lévi-Strauss's binarism, his postulate that all myths (and kinship and totemistic structures) are built out of sets of binary oppositions, which he seems to ground in the structure of the brain itself, has been much attacked. The consensus now seems to be that binarism fits some situations well but as a universal principle of the formation of culture it is untenable.

wife. The parallelism is evident. White woman is adopted and raised by red society, marries a red man; (part) red man is adopted and raised by white society, marries a white woman. This textual parallel poses an exchange between red and white tribes, at best a de facto exchange since there is no alliance between them. Indeed, both inter-tribal transfers take place in violence or as a result of violence; and each tribe subjects the outsider to a total reconditioning, designed to obliterate the effects of previous filiation, as part of its adoption process.* This is an "exchange" between warring tribes, between which there can be no lawful exchange and no lawful marriage.

Still, the film's parallel adoptions and marriages constitute a de facto exchange, an implied contract with reciprocal obligations to fulfill; but the film poses this symmetry only to collapse it. Indian law and adoption, intermarriage on Indian terms are not recognized by the white settlers or by the film that takes their part; only white law and adoption and intermarriage on white terms are recognized. The film's surface progress is toward "recovery of Debbie" but this implies, and the film hardly disguises it, a progress toward the destruction of Indian law and Indian society. This is accomplished in the final Ranger/Cavalry charge that destroys the Indian military force and, metonymically, Indian society itself. There can be only one law, one definition of persons and relationships. *The Searchers* presents the violent triumph of that law, annihilating everything that opposes it or that it defines as "other."

This "collapse" of the film's apparent structuring opposition is itself one of the film's principal ideological and semantic operations. It is certainly overdetermined, that is, required by a number of different systems at work in the film. Let us consider briefly the figure of Debbie. Her choice to stay with the Comanches and with Scar is overridden by Ethan and Martin. Only their methods differ: Ethan wants to shoot her, Martin wants to abduct her. But the text itself rides roughshod over Debbie by making her change her mind suddenly when Martin appears to take her away, a conspicuously unmotivated act in a film that elsewhere supplies too many motives.

The figure of Debbie functions as an object in several other senses also. In Propp and Greimas, she is the object of value transferred from the good kingdom to the evil kingdom and back, over whom hero and villain fight to the death. In Lévi-Straussian anthropology, she is a wife exchanged for whom no other wife can be returned—the offered Indian wife Look is repudiated; therefore she must be recovered. Debbie is equated with her sexuality, by Ethan and Laurie at least, so that, "contaminated" by Scar, she can only be disposed of. All this is overdetermined by the system of sexual identity and the system of subject formation of which it is a foundation. This system has a negative dimension—how men and women may not be portrayed—as well as a positive one. It is inconceivable that a man be cast in the Debbie role or a woman in the Martin role. In classical cinema, aside from some "women's pictures," named and produced as a distinct genre, a special case, a man cannot be the object of value except briefly, e.g., Dean Martin's capture in *Rio Bravo*, from which, however, he delivers himself. And a woman cannot except briefly be a seeker, a searcher, cannot be put in the place of performances, of proving herself through action, as Martin is. Nor can she serve apprenticeships, which make her the subject of a becoming. She is defined and valued always in herself not for herself, that is, as object. This means, among other things, that she cannot change her social or racial allegiance by her own choice—they are not hers to change.

Thus the system of sexual identity requires that the parallelism of adoptions/marriages collapse and that it collapse on the feminine side. What about the opposition between red and white laws? The shift from a conflict between two laws to a conflict within one law is also fundamental to the film's ideological and semantic operations. First of all, it obscures the fact that the white settlers and their government, for personal and public gain, destroyed many Indian civilizations and damaged others, subjecting the survivors to white law. The film recasts the struggle between red and white laws as a conflict within one law, an Ideal Law supposed to reign over all humans. Then it

*But note that Debbie remembers her white childhood and language "from always," whereas Martin is a total amnesiac about his childhood, which, though among whites, stands in metaphorically for his Indian ancestry. Similarly, it is Ethan later who "speaks good Comanch"; Martin speaks it hardly at all despite five years' travelling among the tribes.

casts the Indians as criminals under this law and casts the white settlers, Rangers, and Cavalry as the law's agents, who punish the Indians for their transgressions. The film is precisely structured along this axis, beginning with horrible crimes by the Comanches, which follow no acts by whites but initiate the cycle of violence gratuitously, and proceeding through intermediate stages to their punishment by whites at the end.

This structure is ideological in the traditional sense: a distortion of history in the interests of a particular class; but it is also a psychoanalytic structure. The *Cahiers* reading of *Lincoln* elucidates this.

> It is in the constantly renewed relationship of this group [the white settlers] with another (the Indians), in the dualism of Ford's universe that the inscription of the structural imperative of Law which dictates the deferment of desire and imposes exchange and alliance is realized, in violence, guided by the mediating action of the hero (often a bastard) who is placed at its intersection.[9]

Scar's crimes—rape, murder, dismemberment, burning—eminently violate the law that dictates postponement of pleasure. His acts stand in for the terrifying libido that must be repressed and, if unrepressed, must be punished drastically. His crimes "stand in" for libido because, of course, libido cannot be represented. The film doubles this nonrepresentability by not showing Scar's actions or even their consequences—we see not one dead body of the murdered family. These actions and their consequences are evoked only by Ethan's grimaces and outbursts and even he most often operates to suppress representation—"Don't let him go in there, Mose," "I buried Lucy back there with my own hands; I thought it best to keep it from you," "What do you want me to do, draw you a picture?" "As long as you live don't ever ask me that." This requires the viewer to project unconscious fantasies into the film, which greatly increases the viewer's involvement in it. Put oversimply, the viewer identifies unconsciously with Scar's acts and also with the need for punishing them. This process, which gives pleasure by exercising libido and ego reassurance by suppressing it, imaginatively reconstitutes the structure of the self, thereby promoting what has been called "the maintenance of the subject."

In both *Lincoln* and *The Searchers* there is an early crime and a subsequent movement, the bulk of each film, toward cancelling it. "It is from this ideal Law that originated the cancellation of the criminal act in the fiction [and] the position of the Mother as the figure of forbidden violence (pleasure)."[10] As *Cahiers* argues, Lincoln is both the figure of ideal law (taking it over from his mother and Mrs. Clay) and the agent of its inscription. This forbids his resort to physical force and thereby denies the film "the usual bisection of [Ford's] fiction and the sometimes truly epic inscription of Law thereby articulated."[11] In the case of *Lincoln*, this "produce[s] the Law as a pure prohibition of violence, whose result is a permanent indictment of the castrating effects of its discourse."[12] But the inscription of law in *The Searchers* is epic indeed—the consequence of colorful adventures by action heroes, leading to a death struggle between hero and villain and an exuberant charge on the enemy's village. The party of repression confronts the party of libido in open battle. These epic lures obscure the grim business of inscribing the law that dictates postponement of pleasure—which stands forth nakedly in *Lincoln*. (But isn't Lincoln's courtroom battle with J. Palmer Cass a kind of verbal epic?) Scar is scalped, i.e., castrated, for which his name as well as his crime has predestined him.

> It is the character of the mother that incarnates the idealized figure of Ideal Law in Ford's fiction. . . . often, as in *Young Mr. Lincoln*, the widowed mother, guardian of the deceased father's law. It is for her that the men (the regiment) sacrifice the cause of their desire, and under her presidency that the Fordian celebration takes place; this in fact consists in a simulacrum of sexual relations from which all effective desire is banned.[11]

The mother who incarnates Ideal Law in *The Searchers* is evidently Martha. She is murdered in the initial crime, but it is she whom Ethan and Martin serve, for her that they pursue Debbie, recover her, and punish Scar and his followers. That she is the figure of forbidden pleasure is also clear: first for Ethan, who loves her without hope of fulfillment; second for her husband Aaron, who toils for her and, by staying on the frontier, gives up his life—"She just wouldn't let a man quit"; and, after her death, for Ethan and Martin, who devote their energies to her cause for five years, like Lincoln taking over the mother's function by looking after her children. But from this point there is a division in Ideal Law. When Debbie refuses to leave Scar, Ethan seeks to impose the law of postponing pleasure by shooting her. Laurie

invokes the authority of Martha for this policy, "You know what Ethan will do if he has a chance? He'll put a bullet in her brain and I tell you Martha would want it." But Martin is also acting for Martha when he does all that he can to protect Debbie, from Ethan as well as from Scar. This confusion at the heart of ideal law is one of the most disturbing aspects of *The Searchers;* it reverberates in every corner of the film.

The undoing of Debbie's adoption and marriage and of the Indian law that sanctions them turns us back to Martin's adoption and marriage and to the white law that sanctions them and prescribes their terms. Martin's adoption and marriage are the "relation left over" when the originally posed symmetry collapses, hence they are of particular interest. Martin's adoption is treated on the surface of the film as a long-accomplished fact, but beneath the surface the nature, meaning, and consequences of his adoption are far from settled. Even on its surface, the film uses the character of Ethan to question what has long been settled, notably the matter of Martin's "Indian blood" and his kinship status as an adopted Edwards (white). (It is only one duplicity of a frequently duplicitous film that Ethan is punished for his disturbing the social order by exclusion from the community, though this in some way is duplicitous also.) As in *Young Mr. Lincoln,* the unconscious material lies partly on the surface of the film but arranged so as to be partly unreadable. This makes analysis considerably more difficult than simply identifying unconscious structures. The surface of *The Searchers* is broken again and again by the edges of contradictions that lie at deeper levels. This implies, which is true, that the surface of the film is contradictory, even incoherent, in a different way. It is Ford's skill as a film-maker that covers over and disguises these breaks again and again, indeed that makes a flowing filmic text out of them.

We first see Martin riding a horse bareback and sliding off in front of the Edwards' open side door; he is late for dinner. The wilderness outside the door, Max Steiner's exuberant theme, Martin's high spirits, his effortless transition from exterior to interior—these signify an ideal boyhood spent in oneness with nature. The film will soon shatter this idyll ruthlessly by taking away all of Martin's adopted family, except his hostile uncle, making him an orphan again. But it shatters the idyll even sooner by initiating another signification set: Martin's skin is quite dark and he wears a loose, colored shirt buttoned at the neck, giving him the appearance of an Indian. It is Indians who ride bareback and, in American mythology, it is only Indians who are completely at one with the environment. Martin steps tentatively into the room. The surface question: he is late for dinner, will he be scolded? covers an other question: he is an Indian, will he be welcome at the table? Much of the textual problematic revolving around Martin is posed in this scene, though in disguised form. As it happens, Martin does have cause to worry on this particular evening, for his Uncle Ethan has returned. Martin is introduced and takes his seat sheepishly. Ethan looks at him suspiciously and says, "A fellow could mistake you for a 'breed'." Martin says that he is one-eighth Cherokee, the rest English and Welsh. Martha recalls that it was Ethan who found Martin after Indians killed his parents; to which Ethan replies, "It just happened to be me. No need to make any more of it." Ethan just glares at Martin following this remark; Martha deflects his anger by saying, "More coffee, Ethan?" Then the dinner scene simply ends, in the way that Ford sometimes ends a scene, with no dramatic rounding out, no ellipsis marks. There is a cut to Martin sitting on the steps of the porch with the family dog, half turned toward the door, as though Ethan's hostility has expelled him from the family group. After a scene with the adults inside, Aaron joins Martha in the bedroom and closes the door while Ethan sits on the porch with the dog, as Martin did earlier.

In the morning, they ride after Jorgenson's cattle. When Martin calls Ethan "Uncle," Ethan says that he is not his uncle, and not to call him grandpa or Methuselah either, since he can whip him to a frazzle. What should Martin call him? Name is Ethan. The game of names between Ethan and Martin is another textual duplicity. "I am not your uncle" means that Martin is not kin to the Edwards children, to whom Ethan is uncle, but the rest of Ethan's discourse turns this into a point of personal bravado and frontier democracy.

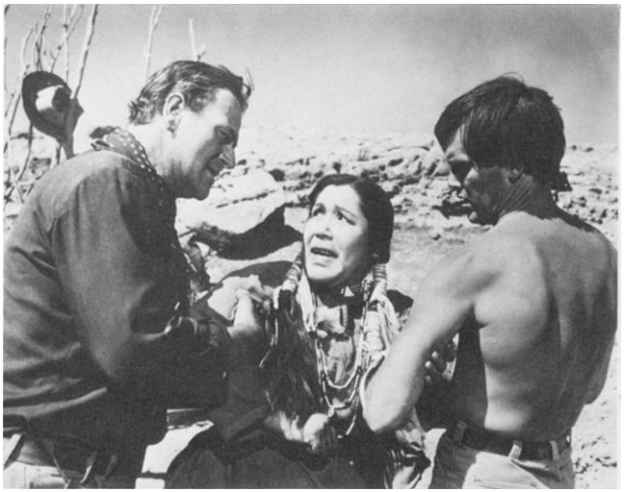
The events following Scar's raid on the Edwards reveal Ethan's deep knowledge of Comanche ways, of horses, of the wilderness. He rests his horse before riding to the rescue, so he rides by Martin

who has ridden his horse to death.* This and other incidents show that, despite Ethan's hostility, Martin has a great deal to learn from him. Others show that Ethan is a good guide and teacher during Martin's five-year apprenticeship. He lets Martin see and know only what he can handle—he does not let him see Martha's body or, later, Lucy's, does not mention that he found Lucy dead, etc. Ethan also holds Martin back, hoisting him by the collar like a schoolboy, to prevent his following Brad into the Comanche camp.

Ethan's hostility to Martin begins at the Edwards dinner table but is restrained there. On the trail it bursts forth in a string of insults and epithets. "Come on, blankethead," (twice). "What does a quarter-blood [sic] Cherokee know about the Comanche trick of sleepin' with his best pony by his side?" When Martin says he thinks they're being followed (he's right), Ethan says, "That's just the Injun in you."

A large figure of textual features has to do with Martin's kinship. Many of his wrangles with Ethan have to do with whether or not he is Debbie's "brother" or otherwise her kin so as to justify his searching for her year after year. As noted these discussions may also be read as treating Martin's status as an adopted white. The kinship question is treated by the text at several different levels and often these levels are mixed or fused.

When the Comanches attack the pursuit party, Martin almost faints after his first shot. Mose Harper takes his rifle, Martin revives and starts firing with his hand gun. This is "the young man's initiation in battle"—Anthony Perkins did this bit in *Friendly Persuasion* the same year. Below the surface, the issue is Martin's firing on his blood kinsmen. The film is quite attentive to where Martin's loyalties lie at this moment of decision. A parallel issue is raised when Martin inadvertently acquires a Comanche wife. He cannot send her back because Ethan says it will bring her tribe down on them; but Martin's misery at her being there, his kicking her away when she lies down beside him, makes clear where his loyalties lie. Ethan's calling her Mrs. Pawley and baiting Martin about her link up with his other jibes about Martin as an Indian.



Ethan and Martin manhandle the Indian "wife"

The kinship issue is discussed explicitly when Ethan and Martin return to the Jorgenson ranch after about a year of searching. Ethan wants Martin to stay behind, apparently because he plans to shoot Debbie now that she is a woman and defiled by Comanches. The next morning Ethan rides off alone; with reluctant help from Laurie, Martin follows in order to stop Ethan from harming Debbie. In the bunkhouse the night before, Ethan and Martin have this discussion:

E: Jorgenson's been running my cattle with his own.
M: Your cattle? You mean Debbie's cattle.
E: He's agreed to take you on and split the increase in my herd while I'm gone. I'm pushing on tomorrow.
M: Well, I sure ain't gonna stay here. I started out looking for Debbie, I intend to keep on.
E: Why?
M: Why? Well, because she's my—
E: She's your nothin'. She's no kin to you at all.
M: Well, I always thought she was—the way her folks took me in, they raised me—
E: That don't make you no kin.
M: All right, maybe it don't, but I intend to keep on lookin' anyway.
E: How? You got any horses or money to buy them? You ain't even got money for cartridges. Jorgenson's offering you a good living here.
Martin, there's something I want you to know—
M: Ya, I know what you want me to know— that I got no kin, I got no money, no horses. All I got here is a bunch of dead man's clothes to wear. Well you told me that already so shut your mouth.

*We might pause at this figure of a cowboy lugging a saddle across the plains as two riders hurry by. Is this the same Martin who yesterday rode bareback and dressed and looked like an Indian boy? A day later he is grown up and looks like a white cowboy, a prime instance of the text's duplicity, gaining all the associations of boyhood, Indian, and nature boy in one scene, and of young manhood and white cowboy in the next. Moreover, the character has grown up in a day; we have now seen him, or we think we have, as a boy in the warmth of home and then a grown man on his own on the trail the next afternoon.

Later when they inspect recovered captives at the headquarters of a cavalry regiment, the officer asks them, "Who is this girl to you?" Martin says, "She's my—" Ethan cuts him off, "—niece." When they arrive at Scar's camp still later and are invited into his tent, Ethan tells Martin to wait outside. Martin pushes past him, saying, "Not likely." Ethan's remark may mean: I'll handle this business best without you, or You're too young for this; but it also includes: This is a family matter and you're not part of the family.

When Martin confronts Debbie, he appeals to their shared childhood to break through to her; but he is also seeking validation from her as the sole survivor of the family of his own claims to kinship by adoption.

M: Debbie—
D: Un mea.
M: Debbie, don't you remember? I'm Martin. I'm Martin, your brother. Remember? Debbie, remember back. Do you remember how I used to let you ride my horse and tell you stories? Don't you remember me, Debbie?
D: I remember—from always. At first, I prayed to you, Come and get me, take me home. You didn't come.
M: But I've come now, Debbie.
D: These are my people. Un mea, Go. Go, Martin, please.
E: Stand aside, Martin.
M: No you don't, Ethan. Ethan, no you don't.
E: Stand aside.

What is going on in this scene is both obvious and subtle, overt and hidden. The adopted white and the adopted red confront each other and declare their kinship to each other. Martin seeks her return to white society, but he does not regard her marriage to Scar as any sort of disgrace. As one who is himself adopted, he cannot fault her loyalty to her new tribe; but as an adopted white, indeed as her brother, he must try to bring her back by any means. It is interesting also that just following this scene affirming the kinship of Martin and Debbie, Ethan formally disowns his kinship to Debbie.

M: (reading) 'I, Ethan Edwards, being of sound mind* and without any blood kin, do hereby—
E: Bequeath, it means leave.
M: bequeath all my property of any kind to Martin Pawley.' What do you mean you don't have any blood kin? Debbie's your blood kin.
E: Not no more she ain't.
M: Well you can keep your will. (throws it back) I don't want any of your property. And don't think I've forgotten what you were fixin' to do to her. What kind of a man are you anyway—?
E: She's been livin' with a buck! She's nothin but a—
M: Shut your dirty mouth.
I hope you die.
E: That'll be the day.

*Surely this is one of the film's little jokes.

Martin persists in asserting and acting on his kinship bond to Debbie despite all obstacles. One of these obstacles is Laurie, the woman he will marry. She reluctantly helps him to continue the search when Ethan abandons him after their first return home. On their second return home, they interrupt her wedding to Charlie McCorry and then prepare to join the Rangers and the Cavalry in an attack upon Scar.

L: Marty, you're not going, not this time.
M: Are you crazy?
L: It's too late. She's a woman grown now.
M: I've got to fetch her home.
L: Fetch what home? The leavings of a Comanche buck, sold time and again to the highest bidder? With savages . . .
M: Laurie, shut your mouth.
L: You know what Ethan will do if he has a chance—he'll put a bullet in her brain and tell you Martha would want it.
M: Only if I'm dead.

In front of Scar's camp, Clayton gives the order to go in at sun-up. Martin says, "Just a minute, Reverend, we go chargin' in they'll kill her and you know it." Ethan: "That's what I'm counting on." Martin: "I know you are." Clayton: "Son, there's more at stake here than your sister." Ethan agrees and tells Martin that a scalp on Scar's lance belonged to his mother. Martin is given pause, then says, "But that doesn't change anything. That changes nothing!" He proposes to sneak into the village to save Debbie before the attack and does so, disguising himself as an Indian—with blanket and no shirt, but with white man's gun and holster under his blanket. Ethan opposes this but Clayton agrees. He finds Debbie and wakes her, saying, "Debbie, it's your brother, Marty. I'm going to get you out of here." She is disoriented a moment then says, "Yes, Marty. Oh yes, Marty." He kills Scar, who has been alerted by Debbie's scream, and the Ranger attack begins. Ethan enters the village, scalps Scar, then rides after Debbie, separating her from Martin. Martin tries to pull Ethan from his horse but cannot. As Ethan rides after Debbie, Martin chases on foot, his hand on his gun, saying "No, Ethan, no!" Ethan does not

shoot Debbie but picks her up and takes her home.

The Laurie-Martin relation deserves a note. Whether or not Martin is a kin to the Edwards family has no bearing on his marrying Laurie: but the unconscious content of the kinship point, that he is a red man adopted by white society, does bear upon it. Even on the surface of the text, if Martin is a 'breed', a blankethead, if Ethan is discomfited by sitting at the family table with him, then a fortiori he should be opposed to Martin's marrying a white woman. Yet neither Ethan nor anyone else in the film even hints at this. In the bunkhouse scene Ethan notices Laurie's attraction to Martin with amusement as she kisses Martin good-night. Also, in urging Martin to stay on at the Jorgenson ranch, he apparently accepts the inevitable match between Laurie and Martin. When they return the second time and Laurie appears in a wedding dress he says to Martin with a smile, "It looks like you two have a lot to talk about." He looks on the fight between Martin and Charlie McCorry with good-natured neutrality.

Martin is the evident favorite of Laurie from the beginning and, it seems, of her mother also. Her father seems not to care, with perhaps a preference for Charlie, for whatever reason. The film is well under way before we see Laurie at all. She is seen in long shot at the funeral, barely coming into medium shot in a frame with several other things happening also. She says a silent good-bye to Martin, who seems awkward until he turns from her and mounts his horse.

When Martin returns for one day a year later, Laurie calls his name irritably and kisses him, to both of which he responds as though barely awake. Laurie's mother asks if he knows her name, he says "Sure I do, her name's Laurie, but I darned near forgot just how pretty she was." The next morning, after more kissing, he suggests that they go steady; she replies that they've been going steady "since they was three" and it's about time he found out about it. Her claim to an early closeness could not be proved by Martin's behavior. Upon the second return, Martin offers to go away so that Laurie can marry Charlie; she replies that if he does, she'll die. (Never was the break-up of a wedding done so inertly.) Laurie tries hard to prevent Martin from going to the final attack on Scar but he goes anyway. Despite her threats not to wait for him, Laurie does wait each time and joins him in the final tableau as they walk into the house.

In the sexual relationship with Laurie, Martin is almost totally passive. The idea of the relationship seems to be hers as does each step that furthers it or reinforces it. Of course this reversal of traditional roles is one of the running gags of the film. It is carried even to a bathtub scene in which the male is the object of voyeurism and horseplay and comically asserts his outraged modesty. Martin at no time displays physical desire for Laurie or a desire to marry her nor does he at any time hurry to get back to her. Martin is the love object whom Laurie chooses and seeks out. She conspicuously desires him, a desire that is presented as physical, indeed as violent, with hard kisses, pushes that knock down furniture, and a constantly agitated voice, alternating between a quaver and a screech.

The running argument between Ethan and Martin concerns in part the issue of kinship by blood *versus* kinship by adoption. In context this is strictly a family matter—Martin is not a blood kin of the Edwards family and therefore, to Ethan, he has no reason to continue to search for Debbie. But altered slightly—kinship reckoned by blood *only* versus kinship reckoned by adoption also—it is also an anthropological issue, having to do with the relations between races and societies. In tracing "the Martin complex" through the film we have also traced the line of a textual duplicity. Martin functions now as part-Indian, now as pure white, while in the unconscious symbolics of the film he functions as pure Indian. This "duplicity" is merely the effect of unconscious structures breaking the surface of the film at several points. It is now time to address those structures and to relate them to the dilemma of this film's power on audiences. If Martin functions as an Indian, is *The Searchers* readable as a myth about the adoption and integration of Indians in white society? Does this account for its power?

Of course, adoption is an ideological notion, a "savage" thinking of social problems and relations on the model of the family and family relations, precisely the sort of logic one finds in myths. In fact, there are historical grounds for considering the integration of Indians into American society under the rubric of "adoption," at least in that in American history the detribalization of Indians was a conscious policy.

Ethan brings Debbie 'home' to white society

(Photos: MOMA)

Meanwhile, Congress proceeded to attempt Indian detribalization. In March of 1871, the treaty system of dealing with the Indians was ended by congressional enactment. The intent of the legislation was clear; Grant and Congress wanted the Indian civilized and Christianized. Since the tribal system was in the way, it would be circumvented. The Indian was supposed to finally become a full participant in American society, but he was to do it as individual, not as a member of a tribe.[14]

But this does not make integration of Indians into American society, including intermarriage, an issue that requires unconscious treatment or that stirs audiences profoundly. It may have been an issue in 1868, but it was hardly one in 1956. Indeed, there were very few anti-miscegenation statutes regarding Indians at any time.

Of the various laws which penalized illicit miscegenation, none applied to Indians, and only North Carolina's (and Virginia's for a very brief period) prohibited intermarriage. On the contrary, several colonists were willing to allow, even advocate, intermarriage with the Indians—an unheard of proposition concerning Negroes. . . . It is suggestive, too, that Virginia's statutory definition of mulattoes extended the taint of Negro ancestry through three generations and of Indian ancestry through only one.[15]

Winthrop Jordan demonstrates Thomas Jefferson's praise of the Indian and his denigration of blacks; and argues that his views, while extreme, are emblematic of American views generally.[16] Jefferson believed that in altered circumstances Indians would become white men, a transformation he thought the Negro could never accomplish. He hoped for the cultural and physical amalgamation of Indians and white Americans. "In truth the ultimate point of rest and happiness for them is to let our settlements and theirs meet and blend together, to intermix, and become one people." Such amalgamation and identification were precisely what Jefferson most abhorred with the Negro.

Will Rogers, who made three films with Ford in the thirties, and who had more Indian blood than the Martin character in ***The Searchers***, expressed the positive view Americans have had of the Indian, at least in modern times.

My ancestors didn't come over on the Mayflower, but they met the boat. . . . My father was one-eighth Cherokee Indian, and my mother was a quarter-blood Cherokee. I never got far enough in arithmetic to figure out just how much "Injun" that makes me, but there's nothing of which I am more proud than my Cherokee blood.[17]

The emotional impact of ***The Searchers*** can hardly come from the issue of the kinship status and marriageability of an Indian in white society in 1956. This issue cannot be the locus of that unconscious conflict in knowledge or social life that activates every effective myth and fixes the attention of its listeners, according to Lévi-Strauss. It becomes explicable only if we substitute black for red and read a film about red-white relations in 1868–1873 as a film about black-white relations in 1956.

What does the opposition "kinship by blood ***versus*** kinship by adoption" have to do with the situation of blacks in the United States in 1956? Of course, blacks were detribalized with utmost violence by the acts that took them into slavery. As servants of plantations their own social organization was forcibly structured in relation to white society; but the questions we have considered under the rubric of "adoption" perhaps arose only with the first freed slaves and runaways. As late as 1857, the Supreme Court ruled in the Dred Scott case that Negro slaves and their descendants were not citizens of the United States or of the

individual states and that prohibiting slavery deprived persons of their property without due process of law under the Fifth Amendment. In 1863 the Emancipation Proclamation freed slaves in areas in rebellion against the United States. Constitutional amendments in 1865, 1868, and 1870 conferred citizenship on blacks ("all persons born or naturalized in the United States"), guaranteed their rights against the individual states, and guaranteed them the right to vote ("regardless of race, color, or previous condition of servitude").

On May 17, 1954, the Supreme Court announced *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, its most important decision of modern times, some say the most important of its history. *Brown* held that in public education the doctrine of separate but equal was inherently unequal and therefore violated the black students' right to "equal protection of the laws" under the Fourteenth Amendment. Because it foresaw difficulties in desegregating schools kept apart for decades and (though it did not say so) anticipated resistance to its decision, the Court postponed its implementation decree for one year, while it considered briefs and oral arguments on the point.

May 1954-May 1955 saw heated debate of *Brown*, including many defiant statements against it. "I shall use every legal means at my command to continue segregated schools in Virginia." "[The South] will not abide by or obey this legislative decision by a political court." The Court's decision reduced the Constitution to "a scrap of paper"; any effort to integrate the South will lead to "great strife and turmoil." The Florida brief on enforcement cited a poll showing that three-fourths of the white leaders of the state disagreed with the *Brown* decision, that 30% disagreed "violently" and that 13% of peace officers said they would enforce state attendance laws at racially mixed schools.[18] The later "Southern Manifesto" by Senators and Congressmen from eleven states dismissed the Court's use of "naked judicial power" to legislate and pledged its signers to use all lawful means to reverse the decision and to prevent the use of force in its implementation.*

Resistance to school desegregation was far more fierce and lasted far longer than resistance to the ending of other segregation practices during this period.

> Desegregation progressed at a relatively rapid rate in a relatively peaceable manner in most areas—from the restaurants of Washington to the buses of Montgomery to the ball-parks of the Texas League. One area alone was excepted: the schools. Streetcars and eating places and amusement parks were, after all, settings for transients who shared proximity for a limited period of time; schools were something else. There the contact would last for six or eight hours daily; it was from interaction with one another as much as attention devoted to lesson books or lectures that school children derived the essence of their education. And so it was the schoolhouse that became the arena for the South's fiercest resistance to the desegregation order of the Supreme Court.[19]

Fear of intermarriage between black and white was one ground of opposition to *Brown*, explicit and implicit. Several states mention it in their briefs and cross-examinations.[20] Miscegenation was not cited more often as a likely consequence of *Brown* because in 1955 twenty-nine states had statutes forbidding blacks and whites to marry. (These were struck down as unconstitutional only in 1967.)

It was in the midst of the *Brown* upheaval that the writing of the screenplay for *The Searchers* and other preparations for filming took place. The novel by Alan LeMay was published in 1954, Merian C. Cooper bought it that year for filming by John Ford with John Wayne, under a production company just formed by C. V. Whitney. According to *Motion Picture Herald*, the shooting of *The Searchers* took place between June 25 and August 27, 1955. (It was released on May 26, 1956.) I have not been able to determine exactly when Frank Nugent wrote the screenplay, but it was almost surely between early or mid-1954 and the first half of 1955, the period that coincides with the initial Brown uproar.

We cannot do here a detailed analysis of Nugent's adaptation of LeMay's novel; but several of the features of the film with which we have been most concerned were added by Nugent. In the novel Martin is 100% white, hence there is no conflict between Martin and Ethan about race;*

*By 1970 much of the South was in substantial compliance with *Brown*. In 1971 the Court somewhat redefined the *Brown* standard around the notion of racial balance and the focus of enforcement, and resistance, shifted to the North.

*In addition to the meanings we have traced, this change is simply good screen writing: it introduces a dramatic conflict between the two principals that heightens and transforms the significance of their external adventures.

but Ethan does try twice to shoot Debbie and Martin attempts to stop him. Martin does not enter Scar's village alone; he charges with the Rangers in the final battle and finds Debbie gone. Ethan is killed in the battle while running down an Indian girl he thinks is Debbie; she is not Debbie, she pulls a gun from a horse and shoots him. Debbie, who has not been Scar's (or anyone's) wife or mistress, but is described as a dusky Indian maiden, has escaped to the desert. Martin trails her there and starts to make love to her on the last page. Laurie has married Charlie McCorry much earlier.

There were two great issues involved in *Brown:* the substantive question of desegregating public schools and changing the relations between black and white races and the constitutional question of securing obedience to federal law. To certain Americans perhaps not enthusiastic about desegregation, *Brown* and the open declarations of defiance to it precipitated the most serious constitutional crisis since the Civil War and Reconstruction. In discussions at the time it was said again and again that decisions of the Supreme Court were "the law of the land" or "part of the law of the land." But whether one started from the desire for justice between the races or started from the need for compliance to law, one came logically to the same problem: how to achieve desegregation and what its consequence, near and far, were likely to be. If one began with law as an abstract principle one was perhaps more likely to approach the problem backwards and in an unconscious way. This is pervasively so in a realm of "savage thought" like the construction of fictions. It is an even more complicated process in a case like *The Searchers* where a structure pre-existing the *Brown* situation is adapted under its (unconscious) pressure. This is what Lévi-Strauss calls the *bricolage* principle: myth makes its structures out of the diverse materials at hand.

We have described the opposition between kinship by blood and kinship by adoption as a kind of mythic fulcrum—it carries both the family dispute of the story and (covertly) the social dispute of great concern to its audience. But how are we to understand the film's elaboration and treatment of the social issue, that is, of *Brown* and its consequences? At first glance, the film's treatment seems quite clear once the conversion from story issue to social issue is made.

As noted, the running argument of Ethan and Martin treats the issue explicitly. Martin asserts kinship by adoption by acting in all respects as though Debbie were literally his blood kin. He insists on participating in every stage of the search for her and, finally, on risking his life to save her. His devotion to her transcends other obligations and filiations; he defends her against Indians (Scar) and whites (Ethan and the attacking Cavalry) and leaves Laurie (twice) to secure Debbie's safety.

Ethan asserts Martin's lack of kinship to Debbie (and to himself) both as a general point of principle (the interview with the Cavalry officer) and as a means of dissuading him from continuing the search (the bunkhouse talk at the end of the first search). Ethan's insistence on literal blood lines in determining kinship, its privileges and obligations, is historically the position of the segregationist and white supremacist. Ethan returns to his brother's ranch from the Civil War in which he fought on the Southern side; he still wears his Confederate coat and carries his sabre. He refuses to recognize the surrender of the South and to take any oath subsequent to his oath to defend the Confederacy. These features mark Ethan as a white Southerner, displaced out west.* This identification occurs partly on the surface of the film but is rendered unreadable in various ways. For one thing, Ethan lacks a Southern accent, which would give the game away every time he spoke of race or looked at Martin askance. Also, John Wayne was associated by audiences with Westerners, not Southerners; the references to the Civil War are taken as character points or preface. There is no mention of the issues of the Civil War or, at any time, of blacks. Also, except for the dinner-table scene and the ride out after the lost cattle at the beginning, Ethan's anti-Indian attitudes are motivated by the plot—"He is bitter about Martha"; hence there is no reason to see them as the film's displacement of anti-black attitudes.

There is another signification set clustered around Ethan: that of outlawism. His not accept-

*In fact, the Central Texas region of *The Searchers* was settled mainly by Southerners before and after the Civil War. Aaron speaks of a neighbor's having gone back to chopping cotton. See Richard Maxwell Brown, *Strain of Violence* (New York: Oxford, 1975), Chapter 8, "The Violent Region of Central Texas," pp. 236-299.

ing the surrender of his side in a war that is long over makes him at least a figurative outlaw. He boasts that he still has his sabre, "didn't turn it into no ploughshare either." (That sabre, through the mediation of a green lieutenant, is later thrust up the ass of the Reverend Captain Clayton, symbol of religious and civil authority in the film.) Ethan was missing for three years between the end of the Civil War and 1868, when the film opens; there are hints that he was an outlaw during this time. "You fit a lot of descriptions," says Clayton. He shows up on the Texas frontier with a bagful of fresh $20 pieces, about the origin of which he is vague. Ethan does shoot Futterman and his two men in the back, making no attempt to take them alive; and he takes back his gold pieces, given in trade for information. This episode gets Ethan and Martin in actual trouble with the law; Clayton takes Ethan's gun and orders him to Austin to answer questions. The Cavalry enters with news of Scar, Ethan's gun is returned, and the film drops the matter. Throughout the film, Ethan violates the religious and social law of his people by desecrating dead Indians, by scalping his enemies, by attempting to murder his kin for marrying a Comanche, etc.

Racism was always immoral and undemocratic but *Brown* made some of its most fundamental institutions illegal. Thus *The Searchers* specifically conjoins the figure of the white Southerner with the figure of the outlaw. (In the novel Ethan came right home after the Civil War and had no bagful of money or other indicia of the outlaw and he is no more anti-Indian than Martin or any of the other main characters.) After *Brown*, opposing the possibility of kinship by adoption, affirming kinship by blood only, places one outside the law. Thus Ethan's exclusion from the community at the end of the film is overdetermined by its unconscious structure.

Martin in effect wins the argument with Ethan by saving Debbie and by returning home to marry Laurie and settle in the community. Ethan returns home only to move on again. He is self-excluded from the community but, as Propp shows, this is functionally similar to forcible exclusion, just as self-dispatch and dispatch by another are equivalent functions. Note that the figure of the white Southerner often functions as a scapegoat on the race question. Our racial prejudice and our guilt for it are placed on his shoulders, then he is criticized, excluded, or lampooned, mythically purging us of them. Thus, in *The Searcher*, Ethan is excluded for our sins; that is why we find it so moving.

The film's ending thus enacts Martin's position; the adopted one marries and enters the community as an adult male. He enjoys the full rights of kinship. But it is not so simple as this, for a number of reasons. First, Martin and Ethan debate several issues, not just this one, and the film treats the issue of kinship and race in many ways besides their arguments. Secondly, what we have called "Martin's victory" is implicit in *Brown;* if the film merely affirmed the non-white's entry into white society and opposed those who oppose that entry, it might not have as great power on audiences as it has. At least it would not bear on the issue of greatest concern once *Brown* is a *fait accompli:* what will the consequences of desegregation be?

The film concerns not only the fact of adoption, the right to adoption under the new law of the land, but the nature and scope of adoption, its rights and obligations. Are the adopted ones equal in rights and obligations to those who have always belonged to the society? Martin wins the argument with Ethan, but what is the price of that victory?

The film does not deal with the adoption itself, the finding of Martin of Ethan, the growing up years, etc.—those matters in the forefront of discussion and awareness in the debate over *Brown.* Rather, it looks to the other end of the adoption spectrum, that which is implied in adoption but not immediately palpable to the senses or to the imagination: What will happen when the adopted one grows up and enters white society as an adult? Thus in *The Searchers* Martin's adoption is a *fait accompli,* a long-settled and accepted fact. The film focuses not on the adoption process, but on the status, rights, duties, and responsibilities of the adopted one when grown.

Although it is a myth about non-whites by and for whites, *The Searchers* may also be read as a manual for non-whites adopted by white society, telling them what they may expect and what is expected of them. In our analysis of the Martin complex in the film, we saw that Martin exhibits unwavering loyalty to the white community. He kills Indian men, spurns Indian wives, even defends his sister against other whites. He devotes

five years to finding her, then risks his life to kill the villain and save her. Martin's passivity in regard to Laurie is also exemplary. The non-white can show no aggressiveness toward a white love-object; if Martin is the example, he can hardly show or feel desire at all. Martin postpones pleasure in the Freudian sense. Laurie offers herself and the pleasures of peaceful life at home again and again, but he refuses until his mission is done. This may be read diachronically (à la Propp) that Martin cannot marry Laurie and enter society as an adult until he has proven himself as fully white, indeed as whiter than white, by the incredible number of performances that he accomplishes. Or it may be read synchronically à la Lévi-Strauss and Lacan: Martin immediately enjoys full white citizenship and kinship (and even wins Laurie) but this creates a *debt*, according to this film an enormous debt, that he must discharge in exchange for this gift. The debt for the non-white is evidently far greater than for whites. On the opposite end of the spectrum from Martin, the good Indian (nigger), there is Scar, the bad Indian (nigger). Scar precisely cannot postpone pleasure—he rapes, murders, dismembers, burns; he is punished in the most brutal way: death, scalping, destruction of his society. The annihilating punishment that Scar receives is also a warning to adopted non-whites of what awaits their transgressions. Correlated with Scar's crimes is the fact that he remains with his tribe, with his people, whereas Martin renounces any tribal tie, loyalty, or memory; this is the pre-condition of adoption.

Our reading is non-reductive—the Indian-white ideological theme remains. There is in fact a kind of double displacement operating in the film at almost every moment, whereby literal events of the text may be read in the Indian-white register and then in the black-white register. But if our concern is the power of a myth, then it is the black-white discourse that must interest us. Power selects a myth; the myth does not create it. Black-white relations were such in 1956, and arguably now as well, that the issues *The Searchers* treats could not be treated directly. This hiddenness is the mark of conflicts of great power and the continuing power of *The Searchers* confirms audience contact with conflicts of great importance to itself but not understood by it. As the Rev. Jesse Jackson said recently, "Racism is the curse of the American soul." As long as this remains true, *The Searchers* is likely to retain its power.

NOTES

An earlier version of this paper was delivered to the American Seminar on Film, supported by the National Endowment for the Arts, at Cambridge, Massachusetts, in November, 1975. I am grateful to Swank Pictures, Inc., for making available a print of *The Searchers*.

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16. *Ibid.*, Part Five, pp. 429-481.
17. *The Will Rogers Scrapbook*, edited by Bryan B. Sterling (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1976), p. 11.
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FOR SALE: Unique and very comprehensive collection of movie magazines (mainly American), stills, books, etc. 1909 to 1940. Invaluable source of information for film research institute, university library or private collector. R. Davis, 99 St. Leonards Road, Windsor, Berks, England.

MICHAEL DEMPSEY

Love and Money, Ecstasy and Death

A CONVERSATION WITH JAMES TOBACK

Hardly anyone has ever burst into American filmmaking with quite the combination of unlikely background and brash command of James Toback. After a life which veered through university teaching, compulsive gambling and huge debts, a short-lived marriage into an aristocratic English family, and an offbeat collection of literary efforts, among them a pseudonymous porno novel called *The Substitute Gun*, Toback broke into movies with his semi-autobiographical screenplay for *The Gambler*. Under Karel Reisz's direction, this magisterial film became one of the most powerful nightmare visions of the seventies, still incomprehensibly neglected. But Toback surmounted its commercial failure in America to write and direct *Fingers* for, of all people, George Barrie, whose Brut cosmetics company was taking a flyer in movies. This seething, hallucinatory study of Jimmy Angelelli (Harvey Keitel), a baroquely tormented New Yorker striving to become a concert pianist, like his ethereal, mad mother, but in thrall to his bellowing gangster father as a brutal debt collector, bucked weak advertising and many hostile reviews to find limited American audiences, much of which it jolted into bewilderment with its garish yet elegant explosions of oedipal trauma, sexual longing, and criminal viciousness. Yet a growing number of viewers know it as the most thrilling American debut film (along with *Badlands*) of the past decade. Intoxicated with the flamboyance of self-destructive seekers after richer, deeper feelings than life seems able to offer in more than tantalizing glimmers, both films also bear the mark of another, often disconcerting Toback work, *Jim: The Author's Self-Centered Memoir on the Great Jim Brown*, a book which grew out of an assignment from *Esquire* to write an article about the former star fullback for the Cleveland Browns. Instead, Toback ended up sharing Brown's Hollywood high life for around a year—parties, sexual bouts, promotion of black businesses, edgy collisions with a racist-tinged Los Angeles sheriff's department. An undoubted descendant of Norman Mailer's "The White Negro," the book is full of pronouncements about blacks as America's true sexual outlaws and sources of psychic power and Toback's obsession with penetrating what he considered an exotic and dangerous world—partly as an initiation rite into manhood, partly as an exorcism of the white's dread of darkness. Later, the book boomeranged against *The Gambler* and *Fingers* when some critics noticed blacks as emblems of dread and swaggering sexuality in the first and Jim Brown himself in the second, playing a scary stud, Dreems, who, in one shocking scene, clouts the heads of his two white mistresses together.

Now comes *Love and Money*, trailing a different brand of controversy—the announcement that Pauline Kael was leaving her critic's post at *The New Yorker* to work on it under the aegis of Warren Beatty, who was going to star in it, then her departure from the project, even though she and Toback were known to be friends. But, as it turns out, he ascribes their break-up to differences of opinion, about which he is nonspecific. "We remain very friendly," he notes. "I would say, probably in terms of sheer obstinacy, that I would be a lot guiltier than she."

In *Love and Money*, a young Los Angeles banker, Byron Levin (Ray Sharkey), chafes against his job and his happy yet elusively dissatisfying domestic life with his girlfriend Vicki (Susan Heldfond), a dealer in rare books, and his grandfather (King Vidor), a former tycoon forever bantering with him in a senile, yet airily witty, track-jumping conversation. (Vidor took the role after Harry Ritz, of the Ritz Brothers comedy team, fell ill after one day's shooting. Toback's original choice, Henry Miller, was too feeble physically to take it on.) When Frederick Stockheinz (Klaus Kinski), a silver magnate brusque with the swollen power of multinational conglomerates, offers Byron $1 mil-

Toback directs King Vidor (and Ray Sharkey—hidden behind him) in LOVE AND MONEY

lion cash to dissuade Lorenzo Prado (Armand Assante)—the new Castro-like leader of "Costa Salva" and Byron's former roommate at Harvard—from his revolutionary policies, Byron glimpses a heaven-sent chance to leap for adventure, wealth, excitement—and, more than that, for grace, harmony, transcendence. It is Stockheinz's mysterious young wife, Catherine (Ornella Muti), however, who finally lures him into a political and moral morass. In a fleet, swirlingly lyrical 90 minutes, *Love and Money* darts to the center of Toback's recurring theme: the mesmerizing emptiness at the heart of life, unappeasable finally by any ecstasy or ideology.

What follows is the gist of two interviews, done last June 18 and July 28, just before and just after *Love and Money* had emerged from the lab.

I feel that your movies are about dissatisfaction with life. Not this or that social system but existence itself. To me, this perspective is often related to formerly religious people, so I've wondered if you were one of these people.

I wasn't in any customary or generally accepted sense of the word. But when you were saying it, it seemed to be as accurate a description as any I've thought of myself, and more inclusive than the one I usually give. Which is that the characters are impelled to expose themselves to danger for the sake of some ecstatic condition that they can get through the risk and can't otherwise. But I've never taken into account what it starts from. I think you're right in saying it's a kind of broad dissatisfaction with the conditions of ordinary life. There's something almost physical about it in all three cases, characters who find it uncomfortable to live in their own bodies. That's most clear in *Fingers:* a protagonist who feels somehow that he hasn't yet found the right home, the right life, the right form of expression for himself—and finally, more than that, the right body to live in. I was always aware of being Jewish in opposite directions. My grandfather was and is (though at the age of 96

he's certainly not active anymore) an Orthodox Jew who always made me aware of Jewish life, Jewish culture, Jewish heritage. He was a Hebrew scholar and a poet and a singer and a tycoon. I read a great deal, thought a great deal, but I hated going to temple. And my father, who was blond and blue-eyed and a quarter Cossack, had a fierce antagonism towards all forms of organized religion and, in particular, towards any kind of concentration on Jewish life.

To what extent did this involve belief in life after death?

Well, that came naturally to me. I mean, I always wondered what it would be like to be dead. When I lived in my grandfather's apartment in New York, when I was four or five, he had a rather large terrace on the nineteenth floor, and I used to lean over it, quite dangerously. My mother would come and snatch me back sometimes. Although it wasn't well formulated, it was a real curiosity, not about death, which I didn't directly associate with falling over, but about whatever happened after one had extended oneself beyond that line. Later, it became "line of behavior," "line of thought," any line drawn by others or even by myself. Later on, when I was 19, I took a ludicrously large dose of LSD, which is the last time I've taken any drug, and went through five days of the worst spiritual, mental, and physical agony of my life. And I don't do any justice to the experience by saying that, because it's as though it were a different life, it was so severe a break-off from everything before and after. I think it's got to have something to do with re-enacting the whole process of birth: that first curiosity to find out what's outside and then the fury to get out and see what's outside and what's next. I think then life becomes the same thing. It's a quest to see what's next. Meaning death. But there are all kinds of metaphors and approximations along the way. Gambling is one of them. Murder. The pursuit of sexual obsession is another. And then, in *Love and Money*, the propulsion not to sexual but to romantic obsession. I think all these extreme forms of behavior and thought that lead one close to death are religious in some way, and that's the way I've always felt religious.

What made me bring this up is the scene in The Gambler *when Axel says, "Give me the three," gets it, and then feels ecstasy flooding through him, very briefly. This ecstasy, not briefly but permanently, is what most religions promise after death.*

Yes. Right. That really is what all three films involve: quests for that permanent condition of transcendence. And none of them can be realized. They're all failed quests. Because if it exists, it could exist only in death. It can't exist as long as one is functioning by the very nature of biological existence, which is one of change, and this is a notion that obliterates change.

Whether you intended this or not, I can picture the heroes of all three movies as formerly religious people who lost their faith in this promised paradise. Which could impel them towards their quests.

Ah . . . I hadn't thought of that, but that's probably true on a level that they wouldn't understand. Probably one of the reasons that they are in a headlong rush to death is to get this life over with, so that whatever comes next will come. But I doubt that it's from an assurance that there's something there (after death). In fact, if you have that assurance, you can slow down that rush. You can think of your life as a kind of sensible program.

One small example of this quest comes in Fingers, *when Jimmy plays the piano alone in his apartment, waving his head and making ecstatic motions. To me, they look willed, not spontaneous.*

That was probably the only notion taken from the outside. Everything else in the performance comes from inside him (Harvey Keitel) and is organic. That was really inspired by Glenn Gould's way at the piano, which I had Harvey study. To have him do it when it wasn't working as well as the other things in the film were is uncharacteristic of me and, I think, of him. He is not a pianist and was never fully at home at the piano. Although, oddly enough, the more I see it, the more it seems to work for me.

I meant that, in a way, it does work, because it shows that even when alone and unobserved—he says elsewhere that he can't play when someone's watching him—he can't achieve this spontaneity, this ecstasy, that he seeks.

Yes, I see what you mean. I could actually use that as a justification, although to me it's the one part of the film (which) felt slightly played, though less and less, as I say, each time I see it. All through each film, there's a kind of physical restlessness which, I think, suggests that yearning to move on to the next stage, some kind of transformation.

And then also—using women that way. In both *Fingers* and *Love and Money*, the woman is the ultimately unfulfilling answer to that yearning. It's "If I can connect with her on a level that no two human beings have ever connected on, emotionally, sexually, psychologically, spiritually, then I will be in that condition now, on earth, through her, with her." Putting that kind of stock in any human relationship is a doomed notion because finally there is less chance of gaining that sense with another person. Orgasm promises it. That's why the temptation is to bring a woman into it as the other half of that harmony and transcendence. Because there is that moment just before coming, even more than actually coming, when that condition is achieved. Poe talked about it as the condition of spirit just before sleep and just when waking up and said that all poetry aspires to that condition. Certain kinds of music, certainly the kind that Jimmy is trying to achieve in *Fingers*, can do that. Gambling in an onanistic way can do that. And in *Love and Money*, it's the idea that Catherine, as an image of allure and sexual grace, can bring Byron all this if she'll be with him all the time. The consequence of pursuing that is usually stiffer and more painful than what would have been experienced had one not made the move in the first place. It's not that a guy risks something, loses, and then starts where he was before. He usually has killed something that was there before he made the move.

We were talking about how some say you could have made The Gambler *much better than Karel Reisz did. You were saying you didn't go along with that.*

Not in any way. First of all, everything that compelled me to direct and made me know that I had some special gift for it came after *The Gambler* was made. So from the start one is talking about a nonexistent alternative. As for Karel himself, I think that the script was much better because of the influence he had over me and the work that I did with him leading into it, which was a year of work and the introduction of themes and characters which weren't there at the beginning. The grandfather in *The Gambler*, for instance, grew out of conversations with Karel in which I told him about my own grandfather. Karel has an uncanny ability to see his way totally into the psychologies of people in whom he is interested. He doesn't have to share the same notions. There's something almost Jesuitical about his ability to feel his way into the texture of another person's psychology. And then, as far as direction is concerned, there is an extremely successful creation of tightness, tension, movement, and dramatic force that was fundamental to that film working. To me, one of the primary virtues of the film is its increasingly claustrophobic tension and squeezing for release. It's not something that anyone can do. There are loads of so-called "action directors" who don't have the vaguest idea of how to create it. And Karel has a kind of leisurely and graceful fluidity at the same time.

Why hasn't The Gambler, *unlike* Fingers, *caught on even in a cult way?*

I think it has to do with two things. First of all, *The Gambler* is not quite so severe or extreme or unrelentingly nightmarish as *Fingers* is. So that while there are loads of people who will always hate *Fingers*, it was possible for people of a certain temperament to develop a real sense of identity and excitement about the film and a closeness to it. *The Gambler* doesn't go to quite the same extreme, so it doesn't quite satisfy the audience that has worked for *Fingers* in that way. At the same time, there is enough of the darkness that is in *Fingers* to make it resist the less demanding and more comfortable requirements of a mass audience.

Caan wasn't your original choice for The Gambler*?*

When Karel came to New York, Bobby de Niro had been coming to class with me—I was teaching at City College for quite a while—had learned the part, and was terrific in it. Karel met him and decided on Jimmy, whom I had never really seen in anything. At the time, I think he'd done *The Godfather*, but it hadn't come out. But Karel was struck by the gambling temperament, the personality, which Jimmy Caan has in abundance. I doubt whether there are more than a couple of actors in the world who have the first-meeting charge and appeal that Jimmy Caan has. He does almost everything well. He's extremely witty, he could be a terrific stand-up comedian, he's a very good pianist, he's the best all-around athlete of any actor in the world. He's a kind of golden boy, a sort of Jewish Prince. Karel's notion of Axel, I think, came very close to his impression of Jimmy Caan. I think he knew that Caan would be better

at certain things than others. But certainly, based on meeting, it was an understandable choice, and I think the gambling stuff in *The Gambler* couldn't be done as well by anybody else.

Some questioned Caan's believability as a college professor.

Well, that was definitely the biggest reach for him and the thing that he was most concerned about, going in. He got a lot of acclaim for it. In fact, critically he fared better than Karel and I did. But both *Fingers* and *The Gambler* were much more successful in Europe, financially and critically, than they were here. Literally 500 people have come up to me since 1974, hearing that I wrote *The Gambler,* and said that it's their favorite movie of all time. It was horribly promoted by Paramount. . . . It isn't a film just about gambling, but certainly it goes light years beyond any other film in dealing with gambling. Gamblers Anonymous, which is the main source of organized, former degenerate, hard core gamblers—there are about three million members in America—shows it regularly.

What about feminist objections to the women in The Gambler *and* Fingers, *Billie and Carol? I remember that Molly Haskell considered Billie a male-chauvinist-pig kind of empty-headed woman.*

I don't think that one needs to start with the premise that there is endlessly fascinating substance to every woman on earth, or every man. To try to make an Everywoman out of every female character is absurd. That movie is really about a male character and the world that he moves in. I think every other character except that woman is built with real believability and richness. I think she lacks some of it. I don't necessarily think that she's any less interesting than Molly Haskell.

Why weren't you able to make her as interesting as the others?

I didn't invent enough unusual stuff for her to say and do. At the time, I wasn't aware of it. But when I see the movie now, I think she's clearly the least well-written character. I think the idea of the character is right. When I'm being hard on myself there, I'm doing it on a standard that would agree with Molly Haskell's point in general but would probably reverse most of her thinking about examples. I think that all the characters in *Kramer vs. Kramer* are totally unbelievable from beginning to end and, in fact, worked from the notion which all critics who start with ideology and work down get trapped in. People who write criticism and don't write fiction or don't know how to write fiction tend to think deductively instead of inductively. Fiction almost always has to be inductive. The best fiction starts with gestures, characters, voices, faces, movements. One is led by the specific to the general. What criticism of that kind implies is that writers and directors should start with general notions of ideal types. It's not very far from the retarded old notion of heroes and villains and good guys and bad guys. This ideologically inclined critical notion is getting more and more prominent. And the more prominent, the more dangerous, because it's having a real effect on the kinds of movies that get made and, therefore, on the kinds of movies that get written. A lot of people with some talent but not a tremendous amount of independence or courage tend to write towards what they feel will be made. It becomes after a while for too many people too frustrating to write one script after another which is rejected not on the merits of the script, not on the conditions that the script sets up for itself, but with phrases like "We have no one to root for," "We have no one to sympathize with," "There's no hero," "There's no model," "There's no six-foot woman with four testicles."

What is your view of Carol in Fingers*?*

She is the kind of girl who would be drawn to the character that she's in love with, Dreems. His character, conversely, would be drawn to a woman like that. To suggest that these women don't exist, that she is a figment of the male imagination, a fantasy figure, would come only from men whose sexual experience has been limited to an occasional

FINGERS ▶

glimpse of the lives of their own immediate families or from women who are at war with something in their own natures that they are not eager to come to terms with.

Also, we don't assume necessarily that she wants Dreems to bash her head.

Right. It's much more complicated than that. Actually, there was one reviewer—it may have been Janet Maslin in the *New York Times*—who said, "Who but Jim Toback and Jim Brown would want to see a scene in which . . ." and then talked about the scene with Jim Brown and the two girls. Well, apart from people who responded to that scene, and many have, in a serious way and in the way that was intended, there were also 1400 people at the Amsterdam Theatre, all black, who stood up and cheered during that scene. I'm not suggesting that as an ideal. Actually, their reaction shocked me; it wasn't my intention. But the narrow-mindedness and backwardness of a critic who is not aware of interests and exictements and personalities that are all around her or him is frightening.

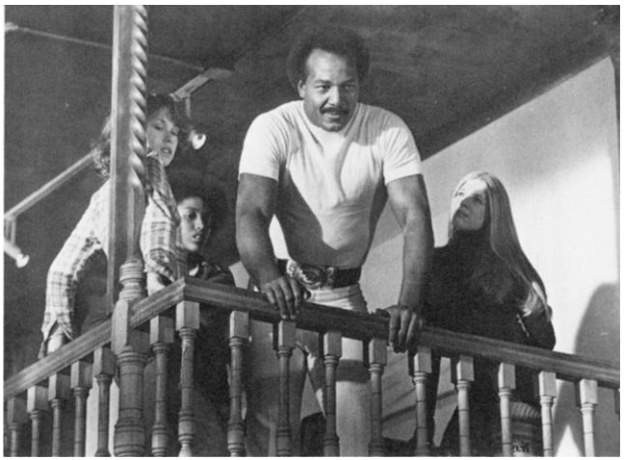
It's also because it's Jim Brown who does it, and you and he have been friends . . .

Yes, and he also did it in real life and was arrested for it.

So there may be an assumption that this head-bashing is being presented as somehow glamorous, exciting, admirable.

Well, if they think that, they didn't see the movie, because its effect on Jimmy is hardly that at all. Dreems is certainly menacing and probably appealing only to those who have some connection to Carol psychologically. She is a woman who is totally real and believable to me. I have no apologies to make either for the character as conceived or as written or as played by Tisa (Farrow), who I think is terrific in the film.

There's an interesting sidelight here. Truffaut loved this film and also was crazy about Tisa Farrow in that part. Most of the critics who picked on that scene and that part have genuflected in worship to Truffaut for 15 years. It's one indication of why they're genuflecting and why Truffaut is making the films before which they're genuflecting. Obviously, there is something in me that is drawn to women like that more than to Eleanor Roosevelt, about whom I'm not currently eager to write a movie. And if I were, I would want to



FINGERS: *Jim Brown and friends*

follow up some of the stories I've heard about personal complications and contradictions in her own life. But I did write a long script about Victoria Woodhull—who was a spiritualist, feminist, ran for president, ran a brokerage house—which Faye Dunaway wanted to do. But George Cukor, who was going to direct, finally backed out on it. In any event, that was the kind of female character these people are talking about. And if they are interesting and believable and real, as Victoria Woodhull was, then I'm all for them and fully excited. In many ways, I think it's the best script I've written, and I feel Cukor could have done a phenomenal piece of work with it. I also think that Catherine, who's a kind of Mata Hari, is an extremely interesting and also varied and complicated character.

The difference is that you make a conspicuous effort to explain her, when she speaks of finding her father after he hanged himself. Whereas Carol just goes right along with Jimmy when he approaches her on the street. I recall that Pauline Kael wrote that maybe what was between them wasn't as obvious as you thought. Is this just a wild, lucky shot for Jimmy?

I think it was a feeling. I think he almost felt her from behind. It certainly wasn't just seeing someone beautiful. She was listening to his music. His definite inference would have been that she was standing out there (below his apartment) hearing him play, that it was a kind of unintentional seduction from the music.

Similarly, some miss an overt explanation of why a brutal, coarse gangster, Jimmy's father, would marry a delicate concert pianist, Jimmy's mother, and why she would marry him.

Exactly. There are directors who, taking that material, would have said: "One thing we have to do—and preferably fairly early in the film—is to have some discussion as to why she appealed to him and why he appealed to her. Because there will be people in the audience who will say, "I don't understand.' " It seems to me that the explanation would be quite clear. The stock phrase for it is "Opposites attract." If one looks at Onassis and Maria Callas or David Sarnoff and Anna Moffo, one sees tycoons, who aren't quite gangsters, with opera singers. The appeal of music to brutality and the appeal of brutality for musicians would seem to me to be a not difficult notion to encompass. The idea that lawyers marry doctors and teachers marry businessmen and truck drivers marry waitresses may well be true in a numerical majority of cases. But it's fundamentally uninteresting to me to be playing out conventional and stereotyped notions of our choices and decisions. What I like to do is stretch things to their limit of credibility and then really get into those extreme cases which reveal the core. My mind works that way in setting up hypotheses all the time. If one is eager to explore the capacity for prostitution in a woman, the question to ask is not whether she thinks she would be a prostitute generally ever, or whether she would take $100 to fuck somebody that she didn't particularly care about, but whether she would take $100,000,000 cash to fuck the most repulsive man on earth. It's by putting things in their most extreme form: "Would you kill your friend if you knew you could get away with it, for X amount of money?" Then you start to find out something about your true feelings about murder, prostitution, betrayal, about the real roots of your integrity. Because if you're constantly casting your life or the lives of your characters in conventional situations with conventional temptations, you only learn that, given ordinary, expected circumstances, you're going to do ordinary, expected things. But so what? That's given from the beginning.

In line with this, the sexual scenes in Fingers*—between Jimmy and Carol, Dreems and her, Jimmy and the hood Patsy Roccamonza's girlfriend—also seem unusually strange and upsetting.*

Sex is still such a sensitive subject with most people. They're nervous about it, they're inhibited about it. I mean, even whores are inhibited, certain whores are inhibited about sex. And films that deal easily and openly with sex, not making it casual but letting sexual chips fall at random, tend to make these people get brutal in their defensiveness. See, it's funny, because to me by far the most unnerving, unsettling sexual scene in *Fingers*—and I think it is to people I've spoken to who are comfortable themselves with sex—is the one between Jimmy and his mother in the mental hospital, which is quite clearly a sexual scene, although the sex is all under the table, as it were.

In Love and Money, *Vicki is quite different from Billie or Carol. What is the nature of Byron's dissatisfaction with her?*

The way I think about them is that they, Byron and Vicki, had compatible interests, liked each other . . .

But are not ecstatic or passionate?

Yes, exactly. Vicki likes his grandfather. It's a nice, domestic situation which fits his comfortable but unexciting job. In fact, it is better than the job. She is a sort of pretty, congenial friend whom he is sharing a house with. But there is obviously an itch to go beyond that. There is in her, too. Each knows there's something more. His temperament is hungrier for it.

Vicki strikes me as a woman whom no one would think of characterizing as some have characterized the other two.

That's right. She's as different from the others as Victoria Woodhull was—in fact, more different, because Victoria Woodhull was also a free lover and a freak. It's just that Vicki seemed right for this film. I like her, and I think Susan Heldfond, who plays her, is terrific and works well with Ray Sharkey and King Vidor in those domestic scenes. But I did not feel that I had to create a character like that.

When I first saw Love and Money, *I was surprised that it moved so quickly, striking all the main points lightly and once. It just goes whoosh from beginning to end, unlike* The Gambler *and* Fingers.

It wasn't that way at various stages of the writing and even as a final script. Nor did I shoot it that way; I thought I was going to have a leisurely pace initially. But when we started shooting, I became aware that the film would work best with a relentless swiftness. After my first assemblage, which did not have it, and after my rough cut, which still didn't quite have it, I recut the film in a couple

of ways, tried some new ideas, and pared everything down to the bone. And then it had it. And as soon as it had it, I knew it was essential. After a certain point, a film takes its own direction, and what it means to direct is not just to impose and lead but also to steer. It's something mysterious that I don't quite understand. But there is a point when you just realize that you're in the rapids, and the most you can do is kind of guide it around rocks. And reversing course becomes the analagous mistake to forcing an actor to say lines he can't say or forcing a scene into the film that doesn't work in the film or forcing a scene to be shot in light that isn't suited to it.

Can we go into the changes from first assembly to final cut?

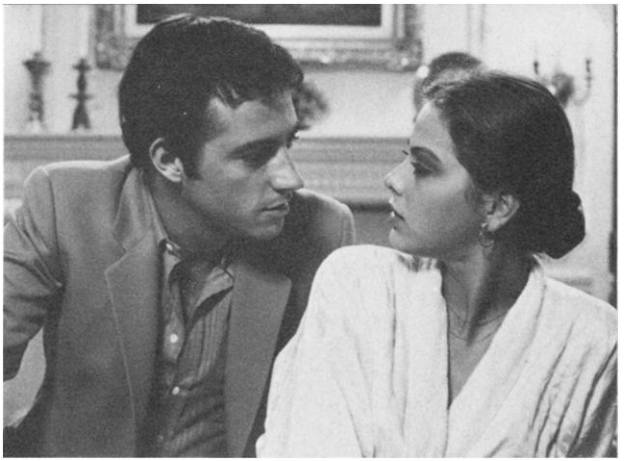
I like movies that speed by, that one has to grab at with the eye and the mind, and that are scene-for-scene and shot-for-shot gone as soon as you do grab them. That is to say, movies which avoid ever allowing the viewer to reach the point where he says, "I got that now." Unlike *Fingers*, which had a rough assemblage that moved like that, the rough assemblage of *Love and Money* struck me as . . . well, by my standards anyway, too slow in five or six places. Part of that was just the elimination of certain shots and shortening shots. But over the next couple of months, I began to see that it also meant the elimination of a couple of scenes, and the replacement of them with a kind of time-juggling that hadn't been in the script or in my mind when I was shooting. The erotic fantasies were not in my mind at any time until the second or third month of editing.

You mean when Byron fantasizes about sex with Catherine, we did not see him in bed with her, as we do now?

What we were seeing was his eyes, and one was meant to imagine what was in his mind, not to see it.

What were you going to do with that footage, then?

Use it a little more extensively where I do use it, in the actual sex scene in the marina, which now becomes both a fulfillment of a wish that was in his mind earlier and an inspiration to future fantasies, or memories. I did a tremendous amount of cutting in the script itself, about 25 pages. I cut an additional ten pages of dialogue while we were shooting and then, beyond that, I cut the equivalent of probably another 15 pages of dialogue in the editing. Once you are seeing the film and hearing the music, you realize how much can be achieved suggestively and subliminally. Not just not to spell it out, but not to have it talked about, even indirectly. But there are a lot of ways, particular ways of making movement swifter, all of which I used in the last portion of the cutting. Part of it has to do with the rhythm of cutting off the end of speech, so that the cues are picked up faster than, in fact, they were.



Ray Sharkey and Ornella Muti in LOVE AND MONEY

You did this with Vidor's lines?

Oh, yes. And not only Vidor. The embassy dinner (when Lorenzo and Stockheinz argue bitterly about the future of Costa Salva) now plays at about twice the speed that it played in the master shot. Lorenzo's rally in Costa Salva was originally a scene in itself after Byron, Catherine, and Stockheinz arrive. And now it's two quick pieces intercut with their plane ride to Costa Salva. Any time you're doing two things at once, you're automatically increasing the speed of both. If you try editing one scene sequentially with another and then intercut them, even though you haven't eliminated one frame of film, the effect is of doubling the speed.

You also have the intercutting of disconnected scenes with the opening titles; the firing-squad scene, with Byron's near execution; and the climax, featuring Blair almost assassinating his master, Stockheinz, in the car, then Byron fighting with Blair and Stockheinz murdering Blair outside the car. All very fleet.

The firing-squad scene took a long time to edit. It was a combination of building up tension and making it fast. I felt that the point of the scene, since the other people being shot are not in the

center of the movie in any way, was to create the tension in Byron—and in the audience for Byron—of imagining that he might get shot.

It's as though, before your mind grasps that death is coming, you're dead.

Yes, that's right. I felt that, if I waited to come in closer until the executioner got to him, it would create more tension, it would single him out from the others. So I let the others get shot in medium long and long shot and let us think Byron's going to get shot when we move in. All the violence I've been near or involved in has happened as it does in all three films, with a combination of general ominousness and totally unexpected suddenness. It also happens in the sort of random way that Godard uses in *Contempt*, where all of a sudden, in the middle of a sunny day, with two people going off to fuck and enjoy each other, a gasoline truck runs over them. But more interesting to me is the creation of this sense around it and then, suddenly, its outbreak. But without the step-by-step build-up. The fight, as they get out of the car, and all those shots leading up to it, are very, very fast and seem faster because one should be inferring a lot of information there which isn't in that scene. One has to make a kind of mental translation there when Blair moves the gun from Byron to Stockheinz: that Blair, who all along seemed to be in the pay of Stockheinz to kill Lorenzo, is in fact in the pay of Lorenzo to kill Stockheinz.

And we get that in about one second.

That's right. There are people who will miss that altogether. Among the people I've shown it to, some were not quite clear on it.

Also, the sounds of the punches in this scene are strange.

Yes, yes. They were real punches. I punched myself in front of a microphone. I did the same thing in *Fingers*. I also cracked myself over the head with a pistol and made it bleed, for that moment when Jimmy hits Patsy in the face with his pistol.

They sound like "pop, pop."

That's because one is used to hearing these ludicrously artificial and fake sounds. Mixers, even the best of them, tend to advise you in conventional directions. Because the other effects in a movie are so unusual and what's going on is so off-center and heightened, I like to keep these sounds as realistic as possible. Not the cinematography to the same degree, though I like a believable look. But I love playing with shadows and color and mood. The use of music in the three films is also important. To me, it's the other, unseen leading character. And the idea of having someone write a score for me is almost inconceivable.

It's a way of maintaining control?

Yes. Unless you're composing the music yourself. I love Bernard Herrmann's scores for Hitchcock. I love Nino Rota's scores, most of them, and Delerue's early scores. But most conventional movie music, when a score is drenched over an entire film, bothers the shit out of me: where is that music coming from? The absence of music in certain places I like, and then, all of a sudden, to hear a controlled sound. *Love and Money* and *Fingers* would have been inconceivable to me without the specific pieces of music that are used in them. Had I not been able to use Dusty Springfield in *Love and Money*, I don't know where I would have gone. Those two Latin songs are infinitely preferable to any others I could have found. The Copland piano concerto is the ideal piece for driving and fucking.

Of course, you said you found some of them by accident.

Yes, totally. I didn't know at the beginning when I was writing it. But as I started choosing the music and fixed on each decision, it became the only way to make that scene work best.

The songs in Fingers *are effective because there is a beauty to a certain kind of really sentimental pop song like "Angel of the Morning" . . .*

Yeah, yeah . . .

Also, because it goes against the grain of its scene: Jimmy entering a pizzeria, his tape recorder blaring the song, to attack a guy who owes his father a lot of money. Whereas in Love and Money, *for instance, when Lorenzo picks up the peasant woman and Byron just watches, the music goes along with the scene.*

Yes, it does there. But that's because I already have two totally different directions going on: Byron as an observer, detached from the scene, obsessed with Catherine and wanting to get to her, and Lorenzo separating himself from Byron with this girl. In *Fingers*, that scene was all in one direction, and I like, at least in one other way, pulling a scene in its opposite direction. Which is why I staged the fight between Byron and Blair in a

rather picturesque manner at sunset on a very pretty, tropical-looking street.

Another very terse story point comes in those early voice-over lines which establish the plot over an image of an unsuspecting Byron in his kitchen. We haven't seen Stockheinz or Catherine yet, and Kinski's accent is very heavy there, which is another obstacle to fast comprehension. Was it always this way?

No. Those lines were added later. It just seemed like a way of adding some clarity and more tension early, and also creating a sense of Byron as a victim walking into a trap. In fact, I wasn't going to make it clear so early in the movie that he was being set up. But the way Sharkey's performance worked in relation to the others pushed me further and further in the direction of thinking of him and portraying him as a victim, as someone doomed to failure in his quest. My initial notion of Byron was to scale him up a little more than he is now and make him a little more capable of dealing with this danger that he is getting himself into. I think it was putting Sharkey up against Kinski, Armand Assante, and Muti that made the sense of his being in over his head unavoidable.

But we know from Who'll Stop the Rain *and* Hot Tomorrows, *in particular, that Sharkey can be crazy, volatile, and hold his own with anybody on the screen.*

Yes, but not on their terrain. His ability to hold up has to be on a ground that his style of insanity works on. Which is to say, not in either Kinski's or Armand's arena. They have a kind of stolidity that works as an underpinning of their mania. Sharkey's seems to come as a sort of flying-off-the-handle craziness that doesn't have that solid grounding underneath. Also, we're asked to assume in this movie that he's been a fairly repressed, contained low-level officer at a bank. In those two movies, he pretty much ends up where he starts psychologically and emotionally. In this film, he's making an attempt at a real transition from one way of life to another, and he's not really equipped to do it. He's not really equipped to do it as written, and I don't think that, physically or emotionally, he's equipped to do it in relation to them as actors. Had Beatty played the part, he would have been able to hold his own with Kinski and Armand. The difficult thing would have been to accept that for all those years he had been working in that job.

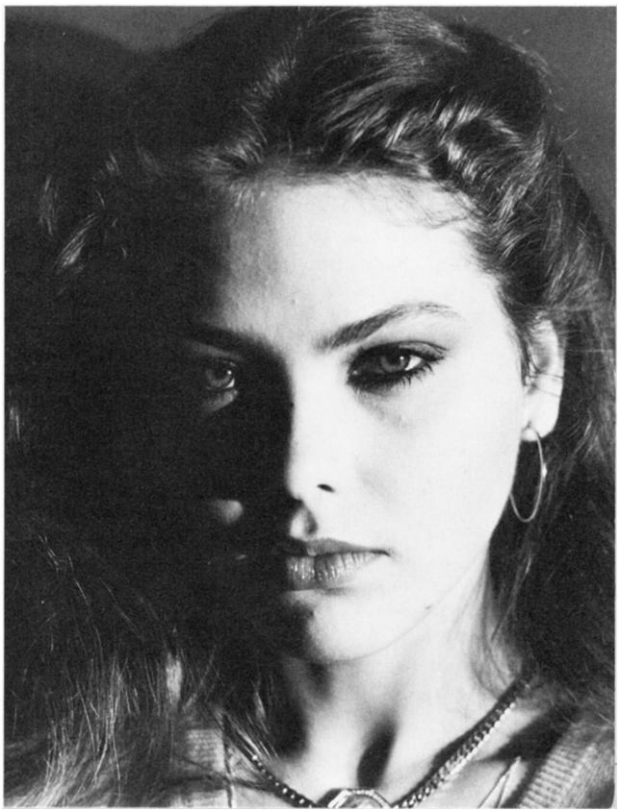
When Byron says to Catherine, "You're rotting your soul, don't you know that?" and then "If you ever touch him or any other man again, I'll kill you"—seconds after first meeting her—I almost felt the thought passing through his mind, "My god, what have I done?"

Yeah, that's right. I think it's a combination of "I can't believe I said this" and "I finally said this." Had she not been Stockheinz's wife, had he not just met with Stockheinz, it's unlikely that he would have said it.

Byron's first image of her is a medium shot, and his memory later is a close-up?

She's looming larger in his mind then, and it's a kind of inflation of perspective. I tried it with the same distance in the memory as it had been in reality, and it didn't quite have the same force that making it closer does.

This differs from the sexual images, which are essentially the same when Byron fantasizes about Catherine and when he is really with her. Can they really be the same?



Ornella Muti ▶

I have myself experienced this many times, and there's something spooky in it—when desire is anticipated. It's almost as though one gears the enactment of the desire, if and when the opportunity comes, to recapitulate as precisely as possible what the fantasy was. He's almost seeing it the way he saw it in his mind, seeing it from the outside while in the midst of it, in the way that you frequently do, I would say, in fights and in sex more than anything else.

The sexual images are very still. Did you have others with more movement?

I did. And I shot them nude, which made it even tougher. I just didn't use them. It seemed much more erotic this way. I break it up with a few shots of movement. In *Fingers*, the sex has more movement in it, but I think that works because they were clothed.

Did this also become more apparent during editing than shooting?

Absolutely. If you had told me beforehand that I would only be using these shots, I would have been certain that you were wrong. In fact, I shot both because I was sure that I was going to mix them and lead rhythmically from these stiller ones to the more active ones. And there were other things that I shot that involved a kind of perversity. One a long shot of her sucking his toes and then panning up and down his body while she's doing it. And it just didn't fit.

During the farewell scene, when Catherine says basically one line to Byron, are we to believe her when she states that at first she worked on him merely as a plotter but later got emotionally involved? I'm wondering if this might not be a bit too terse. Was there more?

No. There was in the script originally. I cut it quite early before we started shooting. It seemed to me that this scene should make it quite clear that it was a set-up and that, in the course of acting out the set-up, he reached her more than she had supposed, but not enough to change her whole life.

Her story about her father, which she didn't have to tell him, demonstrates emotional involvement?

It was her way of showing that she had been reached by him. It also explains why she's with Stockheinz, what appeal Stockheinz has for her. See, I had all that dialogue literal. Byron suggesting that she's with Stockheinz for his money. Accusations of her being, in effect, a whore, and her denying it. Making it indirect verbally—and even more indirect by suggesting that she was with Stockheinz for psychological reasons—was much more effective.

This style gives Love and Money *a strong sense of transience. Byron's great experience just goes zip. Like a dream which you think must be taking hours to unfold in your mind, but really lasts ninety seconds . . .*

That's right. And I think most intense moments of ecstasy or danger or revelation never happen in ways that give you a second . . . I hadn't even thought of this until you just said it . . . they never give you a second chance. Death and exhaustion and fainting and sexual connection and split-ups. All those intense moments tend to happen suddenly, without anything close to the time to ingest them. Sometimes it takes a lifetime to come to terms with the things that just split you all of a sudden. The most extreme example of it in literature is *Lord Jim*, where his whole life is changed and haunted by that split second, which he keeps re-living and re-living and re-living. I think one reason people respond to sports the way they do is the "agony and ecstasy" of those moments. All of a sudden, everything is turned around. And those things do tend to create in the audience the response: "*What? What* happened? *What* was that?"

These ecstatic instants prove that what the characters seek really does exist. But they can't hold onto them. Maybe they just stumbled onto them.

That's right, exactly, but there are no second chances. *Love and Money* does have this sense of quick bursts of possibility that fly right by. It's what I like about it that wasn't there the first few times it was cut.

Yet if some have trouble with the film, it may stem from this.

With too much suggested or not enough made literal? Yeah, I'm sure that's the case. People are used in movies, even in very good movies frequently, to hearing things explained and spelled out, to having the subtext of a film discussed in some way. Both in *Fingers* and *Love and Money*, I had it written at one stage or another and ended up not using it.

Maybe you have to put it in so you can take it out later.

That's right, so you can know it's there, almost. You have it in your life all the time. Certain people don't know what the fuck you're talking about; other people know exactly. And the question is, do you adjust your presentation of your self? And sometimes you do, and sometimes you don't. I did make one concession in *Love and Money*, when Byron says to Lorenzo after the firing squad scene: "I thought Stockheinz paid Blair to kill you. You were the one who paid Blair to kill Stockheinz." It's not anything I'm proud of. I don't know exactly why I did it, except maybe it was an act of cowardice, of saying that, for the story to come together for people, they really have to see this. And although I really feel that they should have seen it by now, I would estimate that probably nine out of ten might not have, and I sort of have to put it in there. As an aesthetic rule, I think I will always be inclined to do—and I hope will do—what will probably work against me in some ways in reaching large audiences, which is giving in to the temptation of over-explanation. In the piece Truffaut wrote about *Fingers*, he quoted Cocteau to describe its underlying notion. I was unfamiliar with Cocteau's remark, but it was a kind of motto for me without my knowing it was there: "Whatever isn't raw is merely decorative."

PETER MAYER

Mr. Klein and the Other

One of the most important characteristics of contemporary film criticism is its propensity to enlist outside bodies of knowledge to the analysis of particular films. Such an approach is beneficial if it leads to better understanding of a film or puts a neglected film into a different perspective. But such analysis has pitfalls for the theoretician who is unreflective about the tools employed: the analysis can easily degenerate to the arbitrary imposition of conceptual schemata that are really extrinsic to the film itself. Moreover, the explanatory model the theoretician applies to a film should be capable of functioning on the same plane of complexity as the film under study. Articles such as the Dayan-Henderson, "The Tutor-Code of Classical Cinema" (*Film Quarterly*, Fall 1974) do clearly explain the complex ideas of theoreticians such as Jacques Lacan, Louis Althusser, and Jean-Pierre Oudart, but little indication is given as to how these ideas might be applied to the analysis of individual films. The following article is an attempt to apply some of the pivotal concepts of Lacan, and to a lesser extent Althusser, to the reading of Joseph Losey's film *Mr. Klein*.

Mr. Klein develops a view of the dialectic of consciousness of self and dynamics of interhuman relations which is so complex in its ramifications that the psychoanalytic theories of Lacan can be profitably enlisted to the analysis of this film. The structure of *Mr. Klein* is deceptive: on the surface, it functions with all the predictability of an undistinguished "thriller" that chronicles the actions of its chief protagonist as he tries to extricate himself from the trap which is being set for him by his adversaries. Brief cuts to the police prefecture and the preparations at the railway station inform the spectator that the plight of the "hero" is becoming more desperate with every minute. However, the film also possesses a latent structure which is in opposition to its obvious structure. In fact, *Mr. Klein* displays the dual structuration of a Brechtian tragedy as outlined by Althusser.

Brecht's great plays such as *Mother Courage* and *Galileo* possess, according to Althusser, a "dialectic in the wings"[1] structure which can be attributed to the fact that there are *two* temporal structures at work in these plays. The temporal structure of the "chronicle" is opposed to that of "tragedy" because "tragedy's time is full: a few lightning flashes, an articulated time, a dramatic time. A time in which some history must take place. A time moved from within by an irresistible force, producing its own content." This essentially dialectical time is opposed to "non-dialectical time in which nothing happens, a time with no internal necessity forcing it into action: on the

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other, a dialectical time (that of conflict) induced by its internal contradiction to produce its development and result."[2] The action which characterizes the surface structure of *Mr. Klein* occupies as it were the center of the stage; the action of the deeper structure has no center and occurs in the "wings" because the real conflict in the film does not take place so much between the characters who are visible on the screen but between characters-in-frame and characters who are beyond the frame, off screen. As far as the spectator is concerned, the characters visible on the screen are involved in conflicts the origin of which must be traced to the deeper and latent structure of the film. Key events in the film have multiple meanings and Robert Klein finds himself in a greater "bind" every time he responds to a change in his circumstances because he misrecognizes (*méconnaissance*) the significance of what is happening to him. In order to elucidate the functioning of the latent structure of the film, it will be useful to step momentarily outside of the film and to discuss the intricate interplay between the "subjects" and the "other" in Lacan's psychology.

For Lacan, the crucial moment in the life of the individual psyche occurs in the "mirror stage" when the human infant "still sunk in his motor incapacity and nursling dependence" confronts the *imago* of his own body in the mirror.[3] What the child sees is his body as a *Gestalt*, a harmoniously functioning entity at a time when his body is experienced by him as the locus of "insufficiency" and uncoordination. The role this primordial experience plays in the production of the subject is important to the analyst if he is to understand the essential alienation of the subject, where frustration is "inherent in the very discourse of the subject." Lacan vividly depicts the conflict that is occurring in the very being of the subject.

The subject finds himself engaged in an ever increasing struggle to possess his being, to establish his own identity. He erects defenses to protect his fragile being, he indulges in narcissistic embraces which ultimately leave him disappointed. He becomes aware of the fact that his ego is *his* construct in the Imaginary, that it has been constituted through the 'specular' effect common to the construction of all images. In his labour to construct his being for another, he realizes that all his confidence in his newly constituted being is continually under the threat of dissolution, because the other, for whom his being has been constructed, can strip him of his identity. This state of affairs is the source of the subject's fundamental alienation. Indeed the ego which is usually defined by its capacity to bear frustration represents the origin of all frustration.

An examination of films such as *The Servant* would reveal that Losey relies rather heavily on the use of mirror shots. In *The Servant*, recurring mirror shots graphically reflect the changing power structure between Tony, Hugo Barrett, and Susan. The usefulness of applying Lacan's theories to any analysis of this kind derives from the fact that it enables us to penetrate more deeply into the inner meaning of a film such as *Mr. Klein* and to appreciate the full significance of its frequent mirror shots.

As Lacan sees it, the individual as subject is involved in a treadmill of alienation, an inexorable drama "whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation." The plight of the subject can be expressed in terms of the mirror stage in the following manner: the subject finds himself "caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body image to a form of its totality."[5] Hence the subject's *imago* becomes the "other," the idealized representation of a self he would like to be, the source of his want-to-be (*manque à être*).[6] The relationship between the subject and its specular image can also be described as a conflict in which the subject "identifies himself in his sentiment of self with the image of the other and in the image of the other comes to captivate and master that sentiment in him."[7]

The latent structure of *Mr. Klein* can be seen in terms of the three-way communication of the analytical situation as conceived by Lacan. The dialectical view of the analytical experience distinguishes essentially three "persons": the person lying on the analyst's couch, the person who is speaking, and the person who is listening (the analyst). In the film we can distinguish Robert Klein, his specular image or self, and the "other" Klein (listening, watching, silent). The action of the film can be interpreted in terms of the shifting relationship between these three "persons."

The problem of identity is raised in the very first frame of the film which shows a face in an

extreme close-up. The camera intrudes upon the very being of the person in the frame and then, as it clinically itemizes the features of the woman's physiognomy and her physical characteristics, it participates in her depersonalization. The camera allows no privacy as we see the woman's wide eyes and watch fingers as they touch the flesh of her face and fold back her upper lip to examine her teeth. The camera draws back to reveal the woman in all her naked vulnerability. Next the film cuts to a scene which contrasts very sharply with the austereness of the clinic but the "civilized and cultured" decor of Robert Klein's apartment does not hide the fact that we are witnessing a replay of the previous scene. This is clear from the way we are introduced to this sequence. We are shown a bedroom with its unmade bed and we see a semi-dressed, bored young woman. Meanwhile we hear, off camera, Mr. Klein bargaining with his latest victim. The camera's slow transit from the bedroom to the living-room underlines the sheer impersonality of the transaction and Robert Klein's attitude to his "clients." The man before him is a non-person; he exploits the man's desperate situation and purchases a treasured family heirloom for a mere pittance. When the transaction has been concluded, a brief *prise de conscience* makes Klein offer his condolences to the man for what is happening to "his people" but the *objets d'art* which crowd his apartment emphasize Klein's hypocrisy.

As the man is about to leave the apartment, something happens which precipitates Robert Klein into a labryinthine journey, a quest where the ostensible object of his search is not what it first appears to be. A Jewish newsletter has been dropped on his doorstep addressed to a Robert Klein. In Paris, in January 1942, such a normally insignificant event assumes monumentally sinister proportions: an aspersion has been cast on Robert Klein's hitherto "unblemished" pedigree and his very right to live has been called into question. The parting of Klein and his client is tinged with ominousness as both are caught in a profile shot which is reminiscent of the shot of the woman (who had been examined in the previous scene) and her husband in the dimly lit corridors of the clinic as they try to assure one another that they have nothing to fear. The man's last words to Robert Klein, "Best of luck to you," are utterly portentous.

Alain Delon in Losey's MR. KLEIN

The film's preoccupation with the question of identity is most obvious from its reliance on the mirror motif. Robert Klein confronts his specular "self" at various crucial stages of the film with obsessive regularity, but what is not so obvious is that the relationship between Robert Klein and his specular "other" has subtly changed at each confrontation. The first time he sees himself in the mirror is after he has received the Jewish newsletter. The look Klein addresses to his specular "self" is filled with puzzlement: up to this moment in his life, he has been smugly comfortable and secure. Suddenly, the very core of his being has been called into question. The next time we see Klein reflected in the mirror is in the café (the camera focuses on the sign "Jews not permitted" as Klein enters the establishment) when he telephones the publisher of the Jewish newsletter. Klein is now engaged in the process of establishing his "true" identity and *hence* his innocence, for in Vichy France these two matters are inseparable. In the "new" France, one's guilt or innocence is no longer determined by the nature of one's actions but by whether or not one can prove one's "real" identity to the authorities and whether or not the authorities approve of this identity once it is established. In fact, the harder he tries to prove his "innocence," the "guiltier" he becomes, the tighter the net closes in around him. Any doubt about one's identity is tantamount to an admission of guilt. Klein's visit to the police prefecture to clear up the mystery of the newsletter arouses the suspicion of the very people he is overtly trying to avoid. As the police inspector who supervises the confiscation of Robert's property says, it is not the first time that a man has voluntarily stepped forward in order to hide his guilt.

A letter meant for the "other" Klein signed by a woman named Florence arrives at Robert's apartment, urging the "other" Klein to meet her at her chateau in the country. Robert "fills in" for the other Klein and stays the night at the chateau. In the bedroom, Robert again confronts his *imago* in the mirror and then finds out an important clue about his own identity. Florence comes to his room to get the incriminating letter from him and tells him, when he refuses to give her the letter, that he really is a vulture while his namesake and counterpart (Lacan's *semblable:* Robert resembles the "other" Klein in stature; the "other's" dog starts to follow him) is a snake that is "biding its time." The image of the vulture occurred previously at the art auction which featured a tapestry showing a vulture with wings spread and an arrow piercing its heart. We are told that this work was a symbol of remorse and the tapestry does epitomize Robert's dilemma. Like a vulture, he has been preying upon the misfortunes of others; the arrival of the newsletter on his doorstep affects him like an arrow through his heart. His self-esteem is at stake and he is forced to scrutinize very closely his whole mode of being. It is ironical that Robert never meets his counterpart face-to-face. The closest he comes to seeing the "other" Klein is when Florence meets a man on a motorbike late at night outside the chateau. The spectator and Robert take this to be his elusive counterpart since Florence does embrace him and he rides a motorbike (as does the man in the photograph Robert retrieved from the "other's" apartment; the man's face in the photograph is predictably turned *away* from the camera). As Robert watches Florence and the man in the distance through the window of his room, we see Robert's face reflected in the window pane. This scene is typical of climactic moments of the film when instead of confronting the "other" Klein, we just see Robert's specular image and the "other" Klein's presence is felt only by the influence he exerts on Robert. The "other's" absence is more important to the latent structure of the film than Robert's visible presence on the screen.

The scene at the chateau ushers in important changes in the relationship between Robert and the "other" Klein. Up to this point in the film, Robert was involved in a struggle with the "other" Klein, to find him and to reveal the "other's" identity to the authorities. However, in the scene which follows Florence's nocturnal tryst, Robert tells her that he wishes to know what the "other" Klein expects of him. Whereas previously the relationship between Robert and the "other" Klein has been *symmetrical*, based on rivalry and competition, now Robert acknowledges the "other's" superiority and realizes that the "other" is in fact determining the course of events. Robert has become the *complement* of the "other" Klein.[8] The communication between himself and the "other" Klein is paradigmatic of the relationship of the Lacanian subject and his specular image: all his actions are addressed to the "other" but the "other" only answers him with silence. The following remarks by Lacan shed light upon the dialectic of their complex relationship: "But if I call the person to whom I am speaking by whatever name I choose to give him, I intimate to him the subjective function that he will take on again in order to reply to me, even if it is to repudiate this function."[9]

The mirror-motif figures importantly in the restaurant scene. While Robert is dining with Pierre, his lawyer, he is being paged. After considerable hesitation, Robert does respond to the call but the person who was paging him has vanished. Instead of finding the "other" person, we see Robert confronting his *imago* in the mirror in a shot which is of longer duration than previous specular confrontations, and which evokes the extent to which his identity is under siege. In the scene which takes us to Strasbourg, the home of the Klein family, Robert's face is seen reflected in the picture which displays the family crests. To his dismay, Robert discovers from his father that there exists a Dutch branch of the family whose blood may have been "tainted."

The change of Robert's status is not only reflected in his relationship to the "other" Klein but also in his relationship to his environment. Before the arrival of the newsletter, he was in control of his own destiny, his victims sought him out and he dictated the terms of their dealings with one another. Now Robert feels at the mercy of events, his life is being shaped by forces outside of his control. Robert's new status vis-à-vis his environment is best objectified in his relationship with

Pierre, his lawyer. He sells Robert's furniture for a fraction of its real value in order to raise the money for Robert's escape from France. Pierre's new role is symbolized by the vulture's head on his walking stick. The tables have been turned and Robert must accept the terms which are dictated to him in order to survive.

Although in the film Robert does not meet the "other" Klein, the spectator realizes that his namesake is really his opposite: the "other" Klein *is* what Robert *lacks*. The "other" Klein has forged close ties with other people (Florence, the concierge, the girl in the photograph) whereas Robert is not close to anyone; Janine is little more than a mistress; he is uncertain of Pierre's honesty and loyalty and Pierre's wife appears to be Robert's discarded mistress who relishes the quandary in which Robert finds himself. Robert wants to be nothing more than a loyal French citizen who obeys the law of the land no matter how unjust and the "other" Klein appears to be involved in acts of sedition. Robert is an art dealer who regards works of art as nothing more than possessions and the "other" Klein is a man of some sensitivity who plays the violin. But more importantly, the "other" Klein is confident enough of his own identity to assail the identity of another.

The metamorphosis of Robert Klein can be read in the film as a movement *from* rivalry and competition *to* cooperation and complementariness, *from* an awareness of a state of "insufficiency" *to* a state of "anticipation." When Robert realizes that the "other" Klein has been hiding all along in the apartment he thought he had vacated, it looks as though he will finally come face-to-face with his counterpart. But Pierre overhears his telephone conversation and gets in touch with the police who apprehend the "other" Klein. The change in Robert's attitude to the "other" Klein is emphasized by his angry attack upon Pierre for having revealed the "whereabouts" of the "other" Klein to the police. It is no longer a simple matter of finding the "other" Klein, denouncing him to the police and clearing his own name. The search has established a real bond between himself and the "other" Klein. He is no longer indifferent to the fate of his *semblable:* the "other" Klein's destiny is now inextricably tied to his own. Thus when Pierre finally arrives with the precious birth certificate of Robert's grandmother to secure his release, Robert is more concerned with meeting the "other" Klein than his own safety. As he is herded with the others to the waiting boxcars, quite predictably, all he ever sees of the "other" is his back and the German Shepherd that accompanies him. Robert has not come face to face with the "other" Klein but with his own humanity.

The closing scene at the railway station includes a long shot of the man who came to Robert's apartment in the beginning of the film to sell him his painting. Like this man's, Robert's fate was sealed from the start, and given the nature of Robert's quest, it indeed had to be. In terms of Brechtian tragedy discussed earlier, his search was "moved from within by an irresistible force."

NOTES

1. Louis Althusser, "The Piccolo Theatro: Bertolazzi and Brecht," in *For Marx* (New York: Random House, 1969) p. 142.
2. Althusser, pp. 137–8.
3. Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits* (London: Tavistock, 1975), p. 2.
4. Jacques Lacan, *The Language of the Self* (New York: Dell, 1968), p. 11.
5. Lacan, *Ecrits*, p. 4. Lacan argues that the dynamics of the mirror stage are due to the subject's prematuration at birth which encourages the jubilant identification of the infant with its image in the mirror.
6. Lacan, *Ecrits* p. xi.
7. Lacan as quoted in A. Wilden, *System and Structure* (London: Tavistock, 1972), p. 465.
8. The terms *symmetrical* and *complementary* are used in the sense Gregory Bateson uses them: "(a) symmetrical schismogenesis, where the mutually promoting actions of A and B were essentially similar, e.g., in cases of competition, rivalry, and the like; and (b) complementary schismogenesis, where the mutually promoting actions are essentially dissimilar but mutually appropriate, e.g., in cases of dominance-submission, succoring-dependence, exhibitionism-spectatorship, and the like." Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (New York: Ballantine, 1972), p. 109.
9. Lacan, *The Language of the Self*, p. 64; Lacan also writes in *Ecrits* p. 86: "What I seek in speech is the response of the other. What constitutes me as subject is my question. In order to be recognized by the other, I utter what was only in view of what will be. In order to find him, I call him by a name that he must assume or refuse in order to reply to me."
10. The concept of "lack" (manque) can be further explained by Lacan's treatment of the complex interplay between need, demand and desire in *Ecrits:* Desire does not result from the appetite for satisfaction or the demand for love but from the shortfall between desire and demand, that is, from the splitting (Spaltung) of the two. (p. 287) Lacan also writes that since man's needs are necessarily subjected to demand, and as the message of the demand originates from the Other, his needs return to him alienated. (p. 286)

Reviews

STARDUST MEMORIES

Direction and script: Woody Allen. Photography: Gordon Willis. United Artists.

Idolatry is the first commandment of the cinema. And the dustier the star, the more idolatrous we are. Despite the old adage, "Ashes to ashes, stars to dust," Woody Allen is not dead, even if he does accept a posthumous award in *Stardust Memories.* If he were a bit more like God (an illusion of grandeur he has brought under control since his speculations on the theological market in *Love and Death*), and if we could pronounce on the cover of this magazine, "Woody Allen is dead," he, like God, would make a comeback. But he is all too human, and there have been other gods before him—Fellini, in this case. The fans and idolators of such directors invariably think they are infallible; the critics, with each new film, wax nostalgic for his earlier films, writing catalogues of his debts to cinema history and excavating the old lovable themes. As the earlier films get earlier, the god finds that no one appreciates his evolution. Ergo, the crisis of all 8½'s: where do I go from perfect?

Stardust Memories is cognizant of the fact that life rambles on, impervious to that one moment of perfection insignificant to one's career, when one felt absolutely at peace with one self and the world. This takes cinematic form with Charlotte Rampling as Dori stretched out over the Sunday newspaper in honeycombed harmony with Sandy Bates doing something equally quotidian. That such simple pleasures can sustain entire lives is one of those awesome truths unrealized by the neurotic, whom Woody Allen has come to represent to his happily manic-depressive public. But there have been intimations of it in the lobster sequence of *Annie Hall,* in the sisters walking on the beach in *Interiors,* in dinner with friends in *Manhattan,* as Woody Allen paid tribute to the single lucid moment in life, made all the more poignant in the life of a celebrity. The rest is hysteria.

Stardust Memories shows how a celebrity filmmaker is celebrated American style. It is not on the Via Veneto, but in a slightly shabby resort hotel with a Judith Crist figure as matron of the arts presiding over a weekend seminar for Sandy's devotees, that the dying and rising Adonis emerges in the shape of Woody Allen. In New York he has just been maltreated by his malingering secretary, declared a prodigal prodigy by his producers, and almost killed by an unkosher cook.

If the opening ticking-clock scene of American Gothic faces trapped in a train with Woody, who is panic-stricken about not being among the Beautiful People in the car across the way, doesn't release general Bergmania, then the obesity of his secretary, the convexity of expression on the faces staring at him, and the padded-cell chic of his existential apartment with the changing back-projection commentary on the scene being played will surely press the Fellini button, but at the very first shot of Woody Allen's face, the audience invariably giggles. Only the initiates—emerging cineaste America—will be able to tell the allusions from the illusions. Does it matter that Woody Allen's isolation in the train is a derivative metaphor, any more than the fact that it is also descended from the mythological parable of the iron rod, where a great feast on the other side of the river seems to be tempting the traveller from the straight and narrow? Lest we stray into the tortuous paths of criticism, let us remember Woody Allen (in the stage version of *Play It Again Sam*) impersonating the editor of this journal (so grandly that it is rumored they offered him the job; he has yet to turn it down). Woody's own film criticism has expanded in *Stardust* to include critics who are also read. It might have been scathing, had Pauline Kael been his critical *bête* in *noir et blanc.* It's difficult to be scathing about Judith Crist.

It would be hard to come away with the impression that Woody Allen likes us. True, the star syndrome has been around ever since stars wanted to be alone, but the way Sandy Bates dutifully signs autographs for his fatuous fans presents a model of *noblesse oblige* inconsistent with the satirical treatment Woody Allen gives them. Through the objective camera we see him being hassled by everybody from a cabbie he grew up with to a groupie who surprises him in bed with, "Isn't empty sex better than no sex at all?" That would have been a legitimate dilemma for early Woody Allen, but at this crossroads we find ourselves

wondering which is more schizophrenic—Woody Allen autographing "Sandy Bates" or Sandy Bates signing "Woody Allen." Being a star—especially a star playing oneself—is more than bank rolls and Rolls Royces, but when the subjective camera shows us through Woody's eyes, why are the star worshippers so grotesque, so vampiresque?

The point of view vacillates within the camera, so that we see the characters addressing us, the camera, and Sandy Bates simultaneously, apparently to enlist our sympathy. It is like the world through the stoned eyes of the robot in *Bananas*, but this unexpected trip turns bummer: what is Woody doing at the Stardust Hotel? What are we doing here? Is this all the fault of his producers, agent and incompetent secretary? As the Woody we remember and love emerges into the limelight, we watch for some normalization of the perspective. There is none, until a couple who represent the new social law firm of Laid-back & Mellow appear—sufficiently unimpressed with him but sympathetic enough to subtly hustle him off to a place where he won't be recognized. This discreet charm of the jeans bourgeoisie is also a callow cliché, but it provides the vehicle for the "memories" in the form of Daisy (Jessica Harper), who reminds Woody of someone he once loved.

Being the open, forthright person such a character should be, Daisy now hides behind her paranoia: "Am I just imagining this, or have you been watching me all evening?" He does not reply, "the former," and let her stew in her own paranoia. No longer feeling observed but rather the observer, he gradually gets more and more involved with her. How really neurotic she could be—how much miserably intriguing fun!—comes out in a phone booth, where her psyche dribbles out in an upper/downer conversation. This quaalude-lidded woman is descended from Diane Keaton's innocent roles, stripped of her more endearing characteristics. In *Stardust* neurotic women have displaced Woody's neurotic role—both Daisy and Dori are role-reversals. Charlotte Rampling's portrayal of Dori definitely depends upon her established image in the cinema as a masochist. In the long shots in scenes from Sandy Bates's film, she is teasingly reminiscent of Lauren Bacall (is he playing Sam again?), but the incestuous traumas that plague her seem designed to recall *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* and *Night Porter*.

Woody Allen in STARDUST MEMORIES

Charlotte Rampling's bruised animality is in aching contrast to the healthy resilience of Marie-Christine Barrault as the other woman, in whose life Woody has been the other man. We meet Isobel after she leaves her husband. (Woody's obviously tired of playing the loser, but it took Charlotte Rampling and Marie-Christine Barrault in tandem to pull him out of character.) Isobel does put us back onto safe ground with Woody: we know it can't work. Like a practiced wife she does facial exercises when Sandy is pouring out his heart to her; she comes equipped with two cherubically obnoxious children; and as if all that weren't bad enough, she's warm, reliable, and a steadying influence. Under producer-induced pressure, Woody changes his ending so that she gets him, as he chases her onto a train—the site of the disastrous opening sequence. But he can't strike from the record his earlier observation that all railroads lead to rubbish, Rome, and Fellini. (As one disappointed Woody Allen fan blurted out, "What a dump.")

What do Fellini and Woody Allen have in common here? First the good news: the critics will be vociferously disappointed. Then the bad news: they're both trying to imitate Fellini. Which ironically enough means they succeed in what they are trying to do. Woody Allen has joined the ranks of film-makers who are so dependent upon autobiography for art that they must render their own lives meaningful in order to infuse meaning into their films. Autobiography, be it by Gordon Liddy or Sophia Loren, is the literary genre terrorizing our time. No sooner do we see people playing themselves than we believe they want us to know

them. In fact, it's the most lucrative form of therapy possible, since there would seem to be a body of critics forever prepared to shrink the author. The Woody Allen cult is probably divided into at least two camps over who's really on the couch in his films. Until now he has generously shared his therapy with us. *All You Ever Wanted to Know About Sex,* like its printed predecessor, shook us down, searching for kinks. *Love and Death* showed us how to advance from mental masturbation (Woody's monologues) to intellectual copulation (dialogues with Keaton). *Annie Hall* demonstrated how much therapy can contribute to the breakdown of a relationship without destroying love. *Interiors* was as interesting as it was difficult, because the conflicts begged for analysis —and not an analyst in sight, as far as the eye could reach. *Manhattan* showed how allegiance to a place can transcend the squabbles of personal relationships and embrace the diversity and perversity New York permits. On the boardwalk of the Stardust Hotel Woody is a fish out of water, a star too bright for its backdrop.

It's inevitable that the public will feel an intimacy with a film-maker as autobiographical as Woody Allen, an emotion denied them in the case of Steve Allen, to grab an obvious example. But with *Stardust Memories,* Woody Allen has given us such an embarrassing image of ourselves for admiring him that he has become the man you hate to love.

What is most disconcerting is that his anti-hero has taken on heroic dimensions—success, magnanimous condescension, political consciousness; he's even learned to drive, so where's the comic flaw? After turning neurosis into a minor art form, he now reflects upon himself among freaks, that is, among people who are so warped as to want to fatten their own egos upon this slaughtered lamb of a celebrity. In the first scene at the hotel, he grimaces his way through "Three Little Words," singing and dancing in a parody of his old incompetent image. There is also a memory of him as a child, again played by Robert Munk, performing his magic tricks to get attention. But now he's normal and the proverbial others are absurd, and he is victimized by his own stardom. The guilt, which he had tailored season after season like the perennial Chanel suit, he has now somehow foisted off onto his fans. As if it's not his fault he's so successful!

Woody's progress has not been in the direction of Fellinian decadence. On the contrary, his earlier humor was outrageous and his new one-liners are so spare as to seem immaculately conceived. He has become a moralist. For example, *Stardust* has a brief throwaway early-Woody chase sequence with police dogs tracking down Sidney Finkelsteen's hostility which has escaped. But in territory with untapped humorous potential, Woody lets Isobel discuss her involvement in the Paris '68 riots as romanticism, adding another conundrum to that one: "To survive in life you've got to stay flexible." His sentiments about survival don't contribute much to a comic vision which took the money and ran. That was the art of survival that made him famous, and his producer is probably right in pointing out that human suffering does not sell corn in Kansas.

One of the keystones of humor is the cop, and Woody works out a sequence of episodes that prove the point belabored in the initial/final sequence that closes the structural ring composition of *Stardust.* The cops stop his car, abscond with his driver who's wanted for mail fraud (mail fraud??), and advise him to make a movie about a cop. Then the same cops discover a revolver in his car and, unwilling to listen to his explanation about not needing a license since he doesn't use it, haul him in. He appeals to the fact that his case is different, he's a celebrity. Cut to the clinker where he sits opposite the grinning idiocy of his recently jailed driver. The moral of the story? We would all end up in the same dump, if justice were blind rather than starstruck. Perhaps that's why these cops are among the most credible characters in the film; the custodians of order are viewed with neorealistic respect.

Woody Allen's strength has been his social criticism. It was Woody as pop sociologist, not the social worker who wants to help humanity out of its misery, that got all the neurotics to come out of the closet. Using his own life in a self-deprecating gesture, he has illustrated the strengths and weaknesses of American intellectuals. When he is accused of feeling threatened by intellectuals, he replies, "I've always said they're like the Mafia: they only kill their own." It is a great one-liner, but

the intellectuals would argue that it is only fair, and after all, what bigger game is there? In this new phase, Woody wants to cut his ties to the intelligentsia, whom he portrays as educated beyond their intelligence. All those people asking pseudo-intellectual questions during the Stardust seminar sessions are set up like pins for Woody to bowl over.

The harpies of the film business, the studio heads, are to blame for this new attitude, if we can believe the clues at the beginning, the changed end, and scattered through telephone conversations in the film, as Woody tries to keep them from defiling his film. During their visit to the resort to show him their innovative and ingenious ending to his film, in which we all wind up in the same Jazz Heaven instead of the same dump, they attempt to represent Woody's commercial interests. Knowing more about more jazz and heaven than the ephemeral studio heads could, Woody gets in one of the most reverberating observations of the film: "To you I'm an atheist; to God I'm the loyal opposition." But in the next moment, as the ubiquitous autograph hounds crowd around, he points out to his agent that they love him today, hate him tomorrow. This is just as shallow a view of the complexity of idol/fan relationship as the studio heads' notion that Sandy Bates doesn't like Jazz Heaven because Woody Allen is an atheist. A black-and-white movie is best when the issues are shaded in gray.

The worst effect of Sandy Bates/Woody Allen's problem is that it is suicidal. With typical self-consciousness, the film incorporates Sandy's assassination by a fan as a paranoid projection, as our idol topples over in a faint. His psychoanalyst sums up the problem with an explanation of the syndrome Ozymandias Melancholia: "Too much reality is not what people want." Although he goes on to regret Sandy Bates's lack of a defense mechanism against life's realities, the film offers as Woody's *pièce de résistance* a sequence in a Fellinian field where the flotsam and jetsam of his critics await a UFO. Sandy half imagines the visit will bring help from unknown galaxies, but gets only a mini-Martian high-pitched chorale advising him, "These are the wrong questions." The more specific issues are addressed: Dori was only good two days a month; Isobel, though less exotic, is better for him, all of which he has heard before, but their parting shot is, "If you want to do mankind a service, tell funnier jokes." The truth of this illusion is reinforced by the beauty of what actually happens on that field—three elegant, old-fashioned hot air balloons (con-) descending to earth, gloriously filmed by Gordon Willis.

The sight gags in *Stardust Memories* yield the best commentary on neorealism's concerns about essential issues of survival. Sandy's brother-in-law is fighting heart attacks by perpetually pedaling an exercise bike; at the end of the scene only his hands are visible, taking a break from his pedaling as they light up a cigarette. While on the sound track his secretary explains how she checks the references of the incompetents she hires for Sandy, the camera stays fixed on the poor schmuck of a delivery man patiently waiting with his brown bag. In the distance a line-up of nuns dance to Sweet Georgia Brown, while Sandy dressed as a rabbi tries to soothe Dori by suggesting they go somewhere after the film and have a baby. "You know I'd love it," she sobs. This is only funny in the context of the scene with Isobel's two children testing Sandy's nerves by being most conspicuous. In fact, they seem to be the only characters in the film who don't love Sandy. And at that stage of the film, we are inclined to nod appreciatively upon hearing French children speak French, calling Woody an imbecile.

Nevertheless, as a memory, *Stardust Memories* is quite good, demonstrating why neorealism turns to neofantasy, why fantasy has trouble turning back to realism, and why directors sit in empty theaters thinking, "Should I change my movie? Should I change my life?" as Sandy confesses to Daisy, who seems to share many empty rooms with him. He does change his movie, giving it an ostensible up-beat ending, excusing himself to Isobel as "not evil, just floundering around." A huge, big, wet kiss sells the idea to her, apparently to the studio heads, but not to us, for he tacks on a scene of the audience at the end of the film and their rumblings of disapproval. "This is how he makes his living?" asks a little old man.

In the finale, the fans and players file out of the cinema, falling out of character as they go. Woody returns to find his Foster Grants and walks out on us for the last time. The magic of the lights dim-

ming into an arc of stars, as lovely as it is in Fellini's sort of way, is nothing compared to Woody's magic tricks. The beautiful long shot of Sandy Bates levitating Daisy on the UFO field, passing a hoop around her suspended body, is a perfect marriage of Fellini and Allen, and it's not going to be laughed at. It's too lyrical. The director's own life is shown fragmented into memories like those jigsaw puzzle pieces with a life of their own that never seem to fit in the big picture. He may be tired of entertaining us and may want to get serious. But if we take *Stardust Memories* seriously, Woody Allen is rejecting us. And that hurts us, as surely as it will eventually ricochet and affect his popularity. When the shit hits the fans, it's time to take the money and rerun.

—KAREN JAEHNE

KAGEMUSHA

(The Shadow Warrior) Director: Akira Kurosawa. Script: Kurosawa and Masato Ide. Photography: Takao Saito and Masaharu Ueda. Music: Shinchiro Ikebe. Twentieth Century-Fox.

Kagemusha, The Shadow Warrior, Akira Kurosawa's six-million dollar epic on sixteenth-century Japan, is being widely acclaimed for its historical accuracy, dazzling visual beauty, and exciting battle scenes. From some accounts one would expect an ordinary genre film, only more expensively mounted, more expertly crafted, and on a more colossal scale. Yet not since Jancsó's *The Red and the White* has there been a period war film that is so conceptually bold. The film focuses, not on action as one would expect, but on the process of signification—the crucial role played by the selection and interpretation of signs in shaping the course of history and in creating a work of art.

The opening sequence introduces, not only the main characters and situation through dramatic exposition, but also the semiotic subtext through its brilliant *mise en scène.* Positioned in the center of the screen and facing the camera, Shingen Takeda, the Lord of Kai, sits on a raised platform under an insignia, presumably a symbol of his clan. His position both in the room and in the frame signifies his importance. Although two other men are present, both dressed exactly like Shingen, only the Lord casts a shadow. The signified, surrounded by four signifiers: a symbolic insignia, an indexical shadow, and two human icons who functions as doubles. (Charles Peirce distinguishes three categories of signs: *indexical,* a sign in which meaning is based on an existential bond between the signifier and the signified; *iconic,* a sign that represents its object mainly by physical resemblance; and *symbolic,* a sign that is arbitrary and coded.)

The human doubles in this scene are more ambiguous than the other signs. We learn from the dialogue that one is Shingen's younger brother Nobukado, who is indexically bound by blood and who has been functioning as the Lord's double in battle; we see that he is also iconically linked by physical resemblance and that he too sits on the dais on the right side of Shingen, also facing the camera. The alternate double is Kagemusha, a thief, who is now being presented to Lord Shingen by Nobukado as an interpretant, or replacement for both of them; he humbly sits across from the brothers on the floor with his back to the camera. Within the narrative, Kagemusha is the icon who, after the death of Shingen, emerges as the film's protagonist, fulfilling the Lord's goals, deceiving his enemies, and unifying the clan. The plot affirms that the hero is an icon and that this is the primary source of his power both in the context of human history and in any dramatic narrative. From a more self-reflexive perspective on the film, we realize that the roles of Lord Shingen and Kagemusha are both being represented by the same actor, Tatsuya Nakadai, which establishes an indexical bond between them; we might even wonder whether an additional stand-in is being used in this scene for one of Nakadai's roles. Conversely, the alleged brother Nobukado, who is played by Tsutomu Yamazaki and whose blood relationship is a fiction within the text, is merely an icon. This scene demonstrates that the filmmakers, whose medium combines all three categories of signification, is able to play with his signs—selecting, coding, and manipulating the interpretations of his viewers. This gives him an extraordinary power—one that is analogous to the power of an historical leader like Lord Shingen, who also understands these processes of signification in directing human events.

This focus on signification is maintained throughout the film and developed with great richness and variation on both the visual and audio tracks, and through the unusual development of

ming into an arc of stars, as lovely as it is in Fellini's sort of way, is nothing compared to Woody's magic tricks. The beautiful long shot of Sandy Bates levitating Daisy on the UFO field, passing a hoop around her suspended body, is a perfect marriage of Fellini and Allen, and it's not going to be laughed at. It's too lyrical. The director's own life is shown fragmented into memories like those jigsaw puzzle pieces with a life of their own that never seem to fit in the big picture. He may be tired of entertaining us and may want to get serious. But if we take *Stardust Memories* seriously, Woody Allen is rejecting us. And that hurts us, as surely as it will eventually ricochet and affect his popularity. When the shit hits the fans, it's time to take the money and rerun.

—KAREN JAEHNE

KAGEMUSHA

(The Shadow Warrior) Director: Akira Kurosawa. Script: Kurosawa and Masato Ide. Photography: Takao Saito and Masaharu Ueda. Music: Shinchiro Ikebe. Twentieth Century-Fox.

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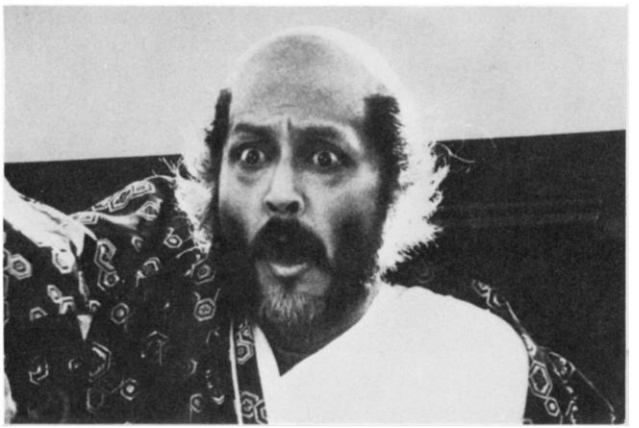
the narrative. In the sequence following the titles, our eyes and ears are directed toward an anonymous messenger, who moves like an arrow from exterior shots to interiors, noisily rushing through silent halls filled with sleeping soldiers, who follow his vigorous movements like a passive audience. The tracking shot accentuates his purposeful motion; both he and the camera urgently seek out the leaders of the clan, who will interpret the news. Instead of opening with the siege of the enemy castle, Kurosawa devotes his first action footage to the process of delivering and decoding a message. This narrative strategy signals that in *Kagemusha* this process will be the primary focus of the action.

This same emphasis also occurs in the death of Lord Shingen. From dramatic exposition we learn that the Takeda clan is laying siege to an enemy castle; the outcome of both the battle and the sequence at first seems to focus on whether the castle will fall. The dialogue informs us that each night someone within the castle plays a flute with great artistry, signifying the power to maintain spirit and control in the face of danger. Assuming that his opponent also knows how to manipulate signs, Shingen comes to believe that if the flute is played again tonight, the castle will not fall. Just as Shingen has his army listen for the flute, Kurosawa directs his audience to focus on the sound track. After a few anxious moments we hear the expected melody, confirming that the castle will not fall, but then we also hear the unexpected—a gunshot ringing out in the darkness. This sign shifts the attention of both the combatants and the audience to the most significant question in the film—is Lord Shingen dead or wounded? The direction in how to listen to the sound track is not limited to this one scene, for throughout the film Kurosawa relies very heavily on audio signs, not only for their traditional functions of accentuating physical gestures and creating emotional tonalities, but also to advance the narrative line and resolve dramatic conflicts.

After being introduced by a sound, the question of Shingen's condition is answered by conflicting visual signs. We see him on horseback, parading before his troops—a sight that heartens his men, and confuses and frightens his enemies. We in the audience soon surmise that this is the debut performance of the Shadow Warrior, an interpretation which may lead us to conclude (prematurely) that the real Lord is dead. In fact, the figure is still Tatsuya Nakadai, who is neither dead nor wounded. We are reminded of the illusion and artifice both in the story and the medium by the dazzling *mise en scène*. We see the Shadow Warrior, garbed in historically accurate costume, posed against an expressionistic red sky that looks like a rear-projection or painted backdrop. In another shot, a line of samurai with spears pass ceremoniously before a setting sun in the background, creating a human shutter that beams dramatic spokes of light toward the dark silhouette of the Lord in the foreground, as if he were the center of the cosmos. These dramatic visual effects remind us that film is a medium of light and shadow, creating an illusion of motion out of still images.

These illusory scenes are followed by visual demonstrations of Shingen's wounds and eventual death, yet these scenes rely heavily on rhetorical ellipses and cultural codes. As if in a courtroom, we are presented with a scene that indicates precisely how the sniper arranged to shoot Shingen in the dark. At the supposed moment of death, we see the Lord, sallow faced and feeble, rising from his sedan chair and then collapsing; a doctor reads his pulse, drops his hand, and we conclude the Lord is dead. Just as the medical profession has coded the signs of life, the cinematic medium has coded the signs of death. Later we see a large majestic vase being carried in a small boat across a placid lake shrouded in mist. This action is observed both by the generals of the Takeda Clan and by enemy spies, a fact which focuses our attention on interpretation. When the boat re-emerges from the mist, we see that it is empty and conclude with the other observers that the urn carrying



KAGEMUSHA ▶

Shingen's body has been thrown into the lake. To subvert this reading of the signs, the generals issue a public proclamation reinterpreting the event as a clan ritual. Despite the fact that we have never seen Shingen's corpse, we reject this explanation as a deceptive move to mislead the rival clans. Yet the generals have been no more deceptive or manipulative than Kurosawa, who demonstrates how minimal signs can be the basis of certainty about historical matters of life and death. Were there any fewer ellipses in the signs concerning the deaths of John F. Kennedy, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Jesus Christ, or any other iconic hero from the past? Will we ever know for certain who killed Kennedy or what really happened in Vietnam, or in any other war? We experienced these historical events through verbal and visual signs that were filtered through our cultural institutions and mass media. *Kagemusha* suggests that all historical accounts, including a samurai saga, are based on the reading of signs.

This idea is developed in the climactic battle sequence, which Kurosawa handles in an extremely bold way. Despite the fact that this is the most expensive Japanese epic ever made, he shows amazing restraint in depicting actual violence, particularly in contrast to his earlier period pieces. Although some of his previous samurai films, such as *Yojimbo* and *Throne of Blood,* also emphasize the reading of signs and alternate between action and interpretation, they still contain many graphic scenes of violence.[1] For the first time in *Kagemusha,* Kurosawa seems to be exploring how little can be shown of a battle while still having it signify what happens with great emotional impact.[2] His choices are stylized and effective; they evoke the Japanese aesthetic of minimalism and understatement. The single resonant image as in haiku. The single physical gesture punctuated by stillness as in Kabuki theater. Before the battle, we are explicitly told that the Takeda generals must know what the moves of the enemy mean, but by the time they interpret the signs it may be too late to act. We are also told the enemy's strategy—to first shoot the horses since traditionally the Takeda Clan have not been able to fight on foot. We also learn that the Takeda Clan intend to change their strategy—for the first time Lord Shingen or his icon will *not* be seated behind them, like a mountain, embodying their traditional stability; for the first time they will be led by his son who will take the offense. This advanced information provides a context that shapes, not only the way each side reads the moves of its opponents, but also the way the audience watches and interprets the minimal signs of battle. The camera pans across a line of soldiers firing sequentially through slatted beams, evoking the earlier scene at the debut of the Shadow Warrior. As we hear the violent sounds of war, we scan the faces of the generals and of the thief Kagemusha who are observing the battle, reading defeat in their grimaces and in their eyes. When we actually see the battlefield, the war is over. We perceive only the bloody aftermath—the corpses twisted into contorted postures, the twitching hooves of dying horses. The final image is of Kagemusha being mortally wounded and running toward the lake where Lord Shingen was earlier buried; the corpse of the Shadow Warrior floats on the water, drifting toward the banner of the Takeda Clan. The icon and the symbol are united and manifest on the surface, while the original lies latent in the depths below.

It is significant that the final image is of Kagemusha. Although we had earlier been told, "when the original is dead, the double has no meaning," the Shadow Warrior has been permanently transformed by his identification with Shingen. The Lord has become part of his living memory, altering his values, consciousness, and behavior, and appearing as a vivid image in his dreams. This transformation is dramatized quite wittily in one scene where Kagemusha sits before an audience who is aware of his disguise, imitating Shingen's gesture of stroking his mustache, winking at his acting coach Nobukado, and evoking tears and looks of astonishment in his admiring observers. We in the film audience simultaneously judge his performance; but since we are aware of the double deception, we realize that Nakadai is merely impersonating himself. The self-reflexiveness of his performance is underscored by the inclusion of a brief inset theater scene and by the line that accompanies the discovery of his true identity, "The play is over!"

Just as Freud suggested that jokes frequently are based on the same latent content as child's play, fantasies, and dreams, we find that one of the few jokes in *Kagemusha* reveals the same semiotic subtext. Before the Shadow Warrior first

arrives at the Lord's castle where his performance will receive its second major test, two attendants literally try to clear the path of all signs of previous traffic, but keep marking the surface with their own footprints. The humor depends on the futility of trying to erase the signs of one's own identity and past experience—a premise that foreshadows the ultimate failure of Kagemusha's impersonation.

It is precisely when Kagemusha is forced to resume his persona as thief that Shingen's influence on him receives its harshest test. We see that the Shadow Warrior has internalized the role: he has grown to love the heir; has come to feel a fierce loyalty to the clan, even though its members now reject him; and no longer wants to renounce his identification with the Lord. In the climactic battle that follows, he is even willing to sacrifice his life. The Shadow has become a man of substance; the iconic bond has grown indexical. Kagemusha dies serving his Lord, and in this sense Shingen's spirit is still alive within him, giving his final action meaning. From this perspective, the entire film could be read as religious allegory, which would lead us to assign new significance to certain details—e.g., Kagemusha had been saved from crucifixion to embody the Lord; in an earlier battle when representing the symbolic role of the Mountain, he was told, "Stand still as if you were crucified."

Lord Shingen's life-after-death is evoked, not only in religious terms, but also on the more general level of human civilization. It is the creation and manipulation of signs that has allowed humans to transcend the mortality of the individual, to pass on what they know to the next generation, and to insure the survival of the species. Even after his death, Lord Shingen's will directs the destiny of the clan, for it is woven into the cultural tradition and is respected by the generals who support the power of his icon. While the clan shows respect for Nature, they always transform it into symbols. For example, the four main armies are named after natural forces that represent change (Fire and Wind) and stability (Forest and Mountain). Such a heavy reliance on signs leads to the valuing of learning over instinct, culture over nature—choices that distinguish humans from other animals. Carl Sagan speculates in ***Dragons of Eden:*** "Much of the history of life since the carboniferous Period can be described as the gradual (and certainly incomplete) dominance of brains over genes."[3] The film dramatizes this shift in dominance. Kagemusha is accepted as icon by everyone —with two exceptions. Only Lord Shingen's horse and his young grandson/heir instinctively know he's an impostor. The horse remains committed to his instincts and ultimately reveals the deception, but the child is programmed to reinterpret his intuition: he concludes that he no longer fears his grandfather, attributing the difference to his own human potential for learning and maturation.

Cheap Thrills!

As the little graph below illustrates, the price of *Film Quarterly* has always been substantially below the rise in the cost of living. In other words, since its very beginnings, the magazine has steadily become a greater and greater bargain. In real terms, it now costs only two thirds what it did at its inception, in 1958!

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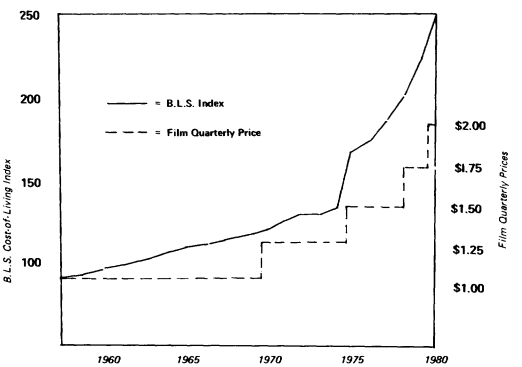

Shingen's enemies, the Lords of the two rival clans, exhibit the same tendencies. Both instinctively "feel" Shingen is dead, yet they reinterpret this feeling as their own strong desire for his death. In other words, they see it as a wish fulfillment, as if they were interpreting a dream. When one of the Lords finally learns that Shingen has been dead for three years, he performs a strange ritualistic dance, chanting "Life is a dream, a vision." As in the case of the grandson, their interpretation is not wrong; it is merely partial. Like dreams, these intuitive signs in humans are overdetermined. The evolutionary development in mammals of dreaming sleep helped to further the dominance of brains over genes. As the dreaming mechanisms grew increasingly complex in humans, the brain developed new ways of processing sensory images from the past and generating new combinations of signs for directing the future.

Both the human power of interpreting signs and the surviving influence of Lord Shingen are vividly demonstrated in Kagemusha's nightmare. It occurs shortly after Shingen's death and while Kagemusha is still resisting his role as double. In the dream we see Kagemusha against a vivid multicolored sky, walking through stylized waves whose substance is dust rather than water. Suddenly Lord Shingen materializes, and Kagemusha rushes back and forth in desperation. The final image is a close-up of Kagemusha's feet submerged in water. When he awakens from the nightmare, he says: "I was surrounded by thousands of enemies." Although we did not see any enemies in the dream, we conclude that he sensed their presence and that's why he was running. At this point in the film, we might see the nightmare as a reflection of his debut performance as Shadow Warrior, in which he was surrounded by soldiers; the expressionistic visuals link the two sequences. Such an interpretation might lead us to conclude that Lord Shingen has now become Kagemusha's Shadow. By the time we reach the end of the film, we realize the dream was prophetic. Both the visual images and the verbal commentary foreshadow the climactic battle in which Kagemusha is surrounded by thousands of enemies, and in which he joins his Lord in a watery grave. The prophetic nature of the dream is also underlined by the mysterious rainbow that appears in the sky just before the battle. Not only does it evoke the multicolored sky in Kagemusha's nightmare, but the Takeda Clan generals explicitly interpret it as a sign of Lord Shingen's presence and as a warning against their offensive strategy. Just as the scene with the flute taught us how to listen to the sound track, this rainbow scene instructs us in how to interpret expressionistic colors and lighting effects throughout the rest of the film. It may lead us to reinterpret Lord Shingen's role in the nightmare—not merely as Kagemusha's Shadow or as a prophecy of the Shadow Warrior's coming death, but to indicate the survival of the Lord's spirit and his continuing influence over the way his clan interprets human experience. One instinctively feels, if only Kagemusha had understood the dream, perhaps he could have prevented the defeat of the Takeda Clan. But then we recall the words of the generals on the eve of battle: "By the time we interpret the moves of the enemy, it may be too late to act."

The same may be true of dreams. Yet unlike battles, dreams contain only the images of action, not the actions themselves. The same is true of both movies and history. *Kagemusha* emphasizes this distinction, for it is an historical reconstruction that foregrounds, not even the *images of actions*, but the human process of interpreting them.

—MARSHA KINDER

NOTES

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3. New York: Ballantine Books, 1978, p. 49.

RIGHT OUT OF HISTORY

Director and Editor: Johanna Demetrakas. Photography: Baird Bryant. Producer: Thom Tyson. Phoenix Films.

Right Out of History is a feature-length documentary about the making of "The Dinner Party," an art piece conceived by Judy Chicago and worked on by hundreds of people. It is the extraordinary accomplishment of this film that, gently and with subtle wit that enriches the exceptionally high quality of its camerawork and editing, it succeeds

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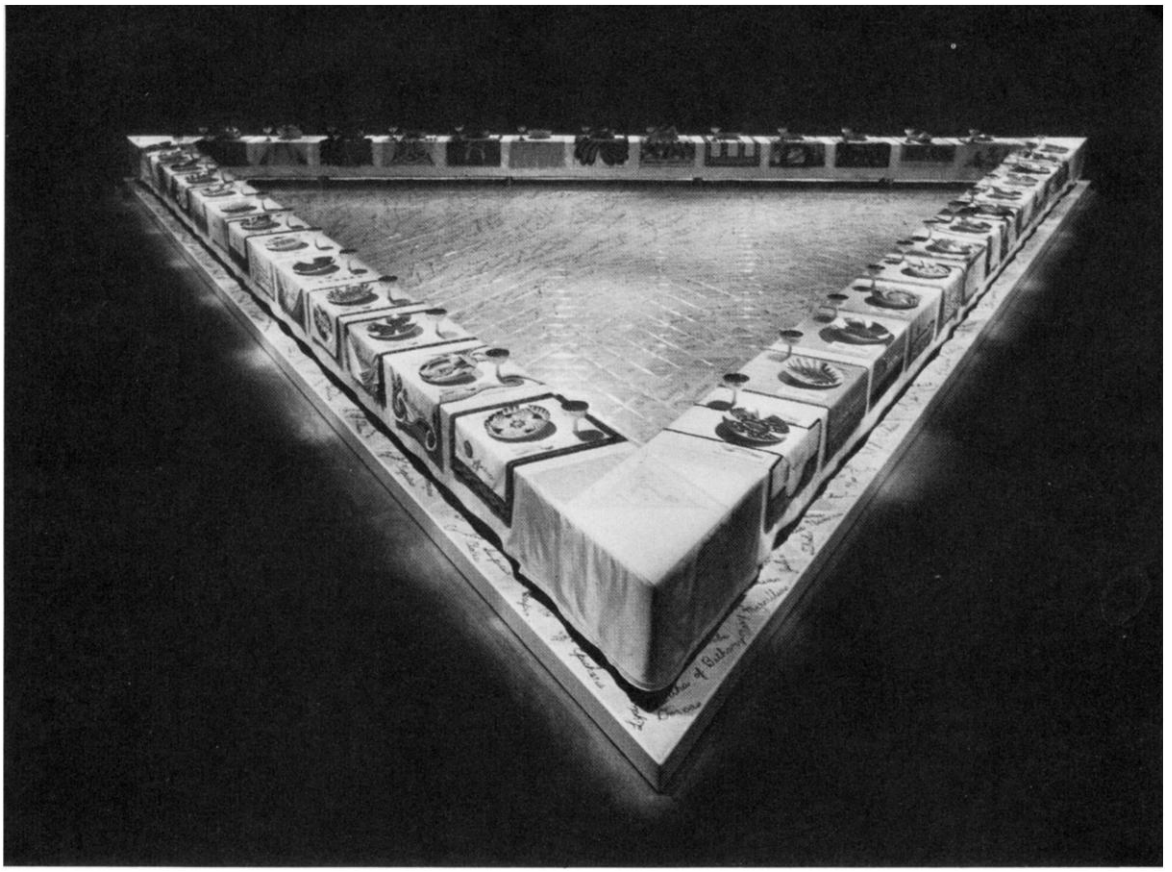


"The Dinner Party," by Judy Chicago

in bringing together the work itself, the relationships and personal development involved in the process of making it, and the reactions of those who see the finished piece. Like "The Dinner Party," *Right Out of History* integrates thousands of people—the hundreds who worked on it and the thousands of women whom research discovered as candidates for the 999 names on the tiles of the Heritage Floor and the 39 who were given places at the triangular table. It brings together centuries of time, from a primordial age of goddesses through the five years it took to make the piece and the film. Director Joanna Demetrakas sees this as very American: "A melting pot where everything comes together. A melting pot of feminist history."

The financing (the film cost about $50,000) also involved hundreds of people in Demetrakas's work-in-progress. With very little grant money forthcoming ($10,000 at the beginning, which gave her heart to go on, and $4,000 near the end that will help her get out of debt personally), most of the support came from 40 or 50 small screenings set up in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and New York, where Demetrakas showed short segments or, later, rough cuts, to sympathetic audiences, mainly of women who knew the project or Demetrakas's work and might be interested in supporting the film. Demetrakas found this extraordinary process painful, but also enlightening. "It was very uncomfortable because people were always commenting on the flaws—How are you going to fix this? What on earth will you do about that? But it was also enlightening. It showed me what really worked. It influenced the editing because I saw the power of certain sequences."

A painter for many years, Demetrakas spent time in Paris after art school, and there she fell in love with movies, especially with the rhythms of New Wave and other experimental editing, which made the films of Truffaut, Godard, Antonioni, and Buñuel "Something a painter could love because they were so textured. The cuts and camera

work were more like the way the eye sees . . . seeing as the eye moves."* Her personal film-making began with editing, she thinks for two main reasons. First, editing was the only point in the film-making process where you handle the physical film. Demetrakas didn't want to let go of that, and still doesn't. Second, she felt safe in the editing room. "There's always been a mystique about women and editing—that they could do it—so the editing room seemed like the right place." But she always believed she would direct: "I was a painter —the one who actually did it." For some years a union editor, Demetrakas is now trying to put together her first package to direct a commercial feature, using her own screenplay, a rich, multi-layered story about a grandmother who teaches her granddaughter the difference between sex, love, and passion. The screenplay resolves toward the wholeness, integrity, and emotional fulness which are of central concern in the "Dinner Party" film as well.

Demetrakas describes her approach to making *Right Out of History:* "I do a kind of responsive documentary. I respond to what I see, but I also have to respect the integrity of what I'm filming. You have to maintain your own integrity and the integrity of what you see—that's the balance, that's the dance." Camerawork and editing reveal the film-maker's choices and sensitivity in handling the material, yet leave the film clearly centered on the subject matter. A typical sequence involves a long or medium shot of several people or an individual concentrating closely on some task, followed by an extreme close-up of hands working needle and thread, pencil, clay, or brush. In an early sequence, a woman teaches Judy Chicago to coat lace with porcelain glaze, one of the many traditional skills she acquired for the piece. Later, we see her hands darting quickly to coat the lace, draw it on a string, and place it correctly on the Emily Dickinson plate— "with layers of frozen lace surrounding her core." In the next shot, the plate comes out of the kiln with a big crack through the middle, and we understand that all that painstaking work must be done again and again. In another sequence, we see Chicago delicately brushing glowing color into the labial opening of one of the three dimensional plates, the camera so close and the lighting perfect so that women in the audience seem to feel the brushstrokes in their own body. In another close-up, we see a plate being worked on, and in the next cut we get an overhead shot of the finished plate, radiant and shimmering—a constant interplay between process and product, between careful human effort and the autonomous power of the finished piece. We realize the enormity and delicacy of this undertaking, and we are made to understand concretely one of the main stories Demetrakas wanted to tell about history and the present: "Women can *work* —can actually do any kind of work, and can do something very big."

The editing throughout is subtly personal. Sometimes the cuts come on movement, sometimes they connect shapes or colors, and sometimes they create meaning through ironic or poignant juxtaposition. The timing is always excellent, creating an experiential rhythm that is one of the film's greatest pleasures. Demetrakas and Nina Toumanoff, who worked closely with her on the editing, also use cutting as a vehicle of wit. For instance, early in the film, the researchers are talking about Kali, the goddess figure created by and for men, and hence imbued with danger and evil. Cut to an extreme close-up of a wickedly glinting, sharp needle. In another shot, we see our first, breathtaking image of the opalescent tile floor, glistening in its triangular perfection. Then the film cuts to Judy and others wiping the tiles as Chicago complains: "Look at all this schmutz. There's a ton of schmutz on this floor." Then she and the others discuss the relative merits of various tile cleaners, and I'm reminded to tears of why I loved *Mary Hartmann Mary Hartmann* so much.

Demetrakas's editing can accomplish extremely moving effects. Near the end of the film, Chicago is talking about their difficulty in finding places to display "The Dinner Party." (After three months at the San Francisco Museum of Art, where it broke attendance records and balanced the museum's books for the season, the piece was in storage for a year; then it went to Houston and Boston. Next it moves to the Brooklyn Museum of Art, only its second "real museum," with no exhibition dates after that.) She explains her own belated

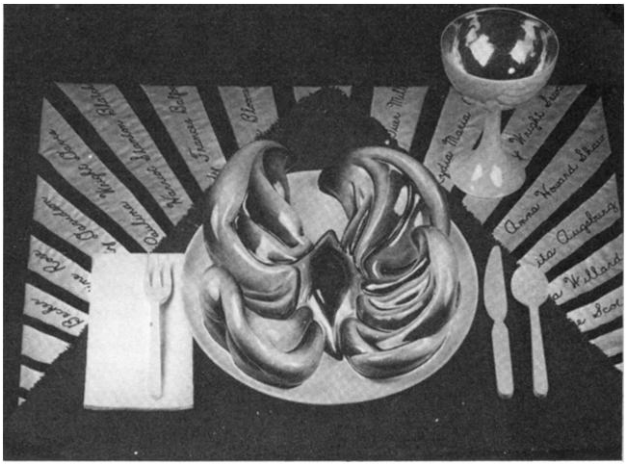
* For detailed biographical information, see "Recording a labor of art," by Linda Gross. *Los Angeles Times* (Sept. 1, 1980), Part V, p. 7.

understanding that the art establishment's deep resentment of the piece was temporarily obscured by the flood of women who have come out as artists in the last few years, and by the passionate reactions of thousands of people to the project. As she speaks, we cut to a shot at the museum where the camera is positioned behind a small girl who stands back alone, staring in fascination at the "Dinner Party" table while the crowds move slowly in front of her. Cut back to Chicago as she analyzes the museums' rejections with these words: "It means —you can't play here."

In a later sequence, Demetrakas uses editing to uncover the humor, modesty, and emotional integration which marked the art-making process at its best. The place settings had to be attached to the table, which meant that bolts had to be put through the embroidered runners. The needleworker primarily responsible for each runner had the task of placing the bolts. Then the runner had to be cut away at those points. As one of the women begins to snip away at the embroidery that has obsessed her for years, the film cuts to an extreme close-up of the scissors at work, and we have a kinesthetic reaction—our bodies tighten and you can hear the indrawn breath of the audience. After a few seconds, the sound track gives us a woman's plaintive voice: "Honey, that does *not* feel good . . . that is *hard* to do." Another beat. Cut to a medium shot as a voice offers a little comic relief: "This is the fun part. You get to peel it back and look at the holes." Everybody breaks up.

The film's concern with the relationships and personal development of those making the piece is expressed dramatically in a number of confrontation scenes. One of the most intense involves a man who was doing video for the project; apparently several people were pressing him to reveal himself more personally, to allow others greater access to his emotions. He was arguing that his entire professional experience had moved him away from this; he had learned to express nothing publicly. In this sequence the goals of the project's work processes are revealed as revolutionary indeed—nothing less than the reintroduction of the personal and the emotional in work, in art, and in human contact.

But the focus is certainly not on re-educating men. Above all, this film is about the relationships



Detail of a place setting in "The Dinner Party"

and hidden accomplishments of women, past and present. In one sequence, a woman complains that Chicago demands too much reading, too much thought, not enough action. Chicago, in her role as leader/tyrant/inspiration, angrily replies that only those who understand history can change it. She shouts her impatience at "How fucking ignorant women not only *are*, but *insist upon being!*" Each time I've seen the film, this moment brings applause from the audience. The developing relationships between Chicago and all the others provides one of the film's unifying themes. In one sequence, a ceramics worker complains that one of the important ceramics designers—a man—doesn't have to fire the kilns or do other drudge work, that the set-up is not fair. Chicago replies, rather glibly, that things are never perfect and she never promised fairness. The other woman asks quietly: "Isn't that what we're trying to change?" Chicago comments no further; we infer that she has accepted the unfairness in order to finish the piece. The other women must decide to do so or not. The personal growth of this ceramics worker provides another thread that draws the film together. Here she presses Chicago to take her analysis of the situation to its limits, and later it becomes clear that she has taken over most of the responsibility for the production of the plates. One of the most endearing qualities of this film is to introduce, indirectly and subtly, in various contexts, elements of a developmental line of imagery or character, without announcing the linear quality or symbolic importance of the elements; thus the audience can slowly create the unfolding significance, as the ceramics worker must have herself in this instance.

The last 15 minutes of the film focus on the fin-

ished work and the reactions of those who see it. The film begins giving us access to "The Dinner Party" as a whole with the overhead shot of the Heritage Floor that I mentioned earlier. Breathtaking in its radiance, it gives us our first taste of the pleasures we might have in looking at the piece even if we knew nothing of its processes. A little later, the camera looks at the whole piece from one of the points of the triangular table, and we see it abstractly, a piece of high art, an extraordinary assemblage of many media. It combines the spatial power of sculpture; the special, compelling strength of the image, as in painting; the glistening, almost decadent thrills of jewelry and precious stones; and the unique combination of imitation, utility, and autonomy that can be developed in ceramics. Then the camera tracks slowly along one side of the table, moves in for details, continues tracking. This highly controlled shot was created by someone pushing an old, wooden museum dolly that carried its own umbrella lighting. The sequence suggests the experience you might have as you move along the piece yourself, combining wholeness and detail in your vision. (The effect of experiencing the piece as you move through it was Demetrakas's primary goal in her 1973 documentary about *Womanhouse*, an earlier group work led by Judy Chicago where she and others transformed the interior of a house into a space wildly expressive of various aspects of women's lives.) Then the film cuts to a very high overhead shot of the whole table, shimmering and pulsating in its physical beauty and in its culmination of everything personal, technical, and aesthetic that the film has shown us so far.

"The Dinner Party"'s combination of craft and art, of history, politics, and aesthetics has been a problem for many viewers and critics. Demetrakas's choice of viewers' reactions reveals these problems and absurdities. One political type in tiny black glasses thinks feminism is a distraction from the true goals; another man feels trapped by the circular imagery; another points out that if you don't like vaginas, you won't like "The Dinner Party." One elegant, middle-aged woman wearing big round beads justifies to a friend the use of the vagina as a central image in the piece, arguing that it's what all these goddesses, heroines, and martyrs have in common (and, of course, it is the common image that has been virtually excluded from the symbol system of technological civilization.)

One of the film's most pervasive themes is the power of transformation. *Right Out of History* opens with the image of a butterfly and closes with Chicago describing how she transformed her isolation as a woman artist. (She has devoted years to bringing out hundreds of unknown women artists; she worked alone for a year and a half on "The Dinner Party" before she realized what her vision actually entailed.) We see a montage of many women working on the weaving, the embroidery, the ceramics, and a little later, we see a shot of the studio jammed full of people, all concerned with another change—the transformation of history, the reintroduction of powerful women into historical spaces that must be forced open to make room for them. For example, one of the research sequences reveals that Katherine Green Whitney (not her husband) actually invented the cotton gin. Since women couldn't hold patents, her husband registered it, and she disappeared right out of history.

SCREEN

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Throughout the film, we see many images of women whose skills were developed far beyond their expectations, like the woman who made hundreds of perfect tiles for the floor when no tile company would undertake the job. She then confesses, a little embarrassed at seeming to praise herself, that she did get "a sense of satisfaction" from the job. Or my favorite, the woman who struggled against Chicago's insistence on discipline because, a victim of her own stereotypes, she thought that focus meant limitation—then she found out that focus means expansion, that intense concentration can take you to the infinite center of anything.

The film also reveals another important and closely related transformation within the world of art itself: the transformation of traditional female crafts such as needlework and china painting into high art, and the expansion of the audience for such techniques. Such an effort involves breaking down some of the art world's most cherished categories. In addition, as I suggested earlier, the insistence on vaginal imagery exerts a pressure against convention that some find intolerable. If the world of "legitimate art" is expanded to include these media and images, then the control of the spaces, materials, and rewards of art-making might also be transformed.

As Chicago remarks early in the film, in one of its resonances "The Dinner Party" represents an ironic version of one of the world's most famous traditional images of martyrdom—The Last Supper —but since women are themselves the plates, they are closely linked, not with the consumers, but with the consumed. It is the triumph of the piece and of *Right Out of History* to build on this profoundly ironic awareness of violence, not a complaint but a transcendence, a metamorphosis that is subtle, personal, and successful as art and as documentary.

Right Out of History has been screened as a feature in the Pacific Film Archive, at theaters in Boston and Houston, and filled the house for two nights of excited audiences in LA where the theater has rebooked the film. It almost makes its booking costs in long runs as well, which is amazing in the absence of any conventional advertising. It has been accepted at the London, Berlin, and Neon (Switzerland) film festivals. It has recently been bought for broadcasting by the BBC. As we reflected on the film's rejection by LA's 1979 Filmex, Demetrakas suggested: "It has a kind of unpretentious quality . . . some people don't see what it is . . . don't see its universality."

From the feature film, Demetrakas takes the length of *History*, the exceptional quality of its camerawork and editing, and its highly controlled surface. From the documentary, the film gets its basic stance of detailed, nonfictional investigation of something significant in the world, where you have to be present to catch the accident of the cracked Dickinson plate or the confrontation between Chicago and the ceramics worker. Demetrakas rejects the scientific or educational "objectivity" of the conventional documentary, offering instead not storyline or fiction, but the personal vision of the independent filmmaker. Like the phenomenon it documents, *Right Out of History* involves a wide-ranging and original process of generic integration, creating an expanded audience for the documentary.

—BEVERLE HOUSTON

LAST OF THE BLUE DEVILS

Director and producer: Bruce Ricker. Editor: Thomasin Henkel. 35mm distribution: Lloyd Kohn/Nightfall, 8033 Sunset Blvd., Box 233, Los Angeles 90046. 16mm: Direct Cinema Ltd., Box 69589, Los Angeles 90069.

Like dance film, movies concentrating on jazz performance have often evoked a tension between the subject's control over his materials and the filmmaker's formalizing impulses. Until recently, jazz has been ill-served by the movies, a few shorts excepted like Gjon Mili's *Jammin' the Blues* (1944) and Roger Tilton's *Jazz Dance* (1954) which was shot in part by Richard Leacock. Even in these films, the directors held the reins tight. Mili isolates his artists against big, high-fashion cycloramas. Tilton accelerates the frenzy of a New York dixieland beer bust with flashy editing.

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LAST OF THE BLUE DEVILS

mented at all, has been pummeled into fictionalized "true biographies" or rendered clownish for the sake of broad appeal.

Television bears like responsibility for trivializing jazz, concentrating largely on big names like Ellington and Armstrong or guest-spotting old performers such as Eubie Blake and Alberta Hunter. Yet live TV, when pointed at musicians, at least subordinates itself. Unlike the film editor, a television switcher is time-bound and limited to available camera positions in documenting a jazz execution which otherwise maintains its own pace and dynamics. Series on PBS such as the current *Jazz at the Maintenance Shop* and an earlier *Jazz at the Top* let artists control their own repertoires, and sometimes at least they schedule modern performers. In the memories of fans, a 1957 CBS program on *The Liveliest Arts* called "The Sound of Jazz" was television's finest hour. Producers Whitney Balliet and Nat Hentoff had the good sense simply to situate the likes of Billie Holiday, Thelonious Monk, Coleman Hawkins and Pee Wee Russell in a studio and leave them alone.

With the advent of flexible, portable, double-system 16mm equipment, the preservation of jazz performance has occasionally accompanied other forms of contemporary documentary. Sometimes these productions even try to catch something of the musicians' lives off the bandstand. British film critics Alan Lovell and Paddy Whannel did this in *Living Jazz* (1961) whose subject was Bruce Turner's small band. In *Memories of Duke* (1980), director Gary Keys combines reminiscences of old musicians with a 1968 Ellington tour of Mexico.

The pre-bop generations of jazz players are now dead or very aged, although a surprising number can still perform, at least occasionally, if there is any work. The chances to preserve an art so inextricably linked to individual performance are slipping by. *No Maps on My Taps* (1979) and *Tap-dançin'* (1980) investigate the world of jazz dance with performers like Honi Coles, Sandman Sims, Bunny Briggs, and John Bubbles. Filmed over a two-year period and featuring surviving black swing musicians, a 1970 venture by Louis and Claudine Pannassié, *L'Aventure du jazz*, has been little shown. So a further difficulty is one of recouping expenses often incurred in bursts of unbusinesslike dedication.

The world of the aging musician is peopled with personal memories, past professional associations, a sense of artistic history, and, with luck, continuing performance. In reflection, film (as contrasted with television) will now intercut new footage with early clips, photographs, and voiceover reminiscence. A good example is *The Last of the Blue Devils*, executed by Bruce Ricker, a lawyer, with dedication, understanding and common sense. Its title identifies remaining members of a midwest 'twenties and early 'thirties group, what was known in that time as a Territory band. The Blue Devils worked on a "commonwealth plan." Matters of personnel, wages, and bookings were handled by majority vote, profits divided equally. Their headquarters was originally Oklahoma City. Leadership was inherited by Walter Page, who played string bass, tuba, and baritone sax. At its peak, the band included Hot Lips Page, Bill Basie, Lester Young, Jimmy Rushing, and Buster Smith, who, with Young, was especially well thought of by young Charlie Parker.

The film centers on the jazzmen and jazz/blues styles of Kansas City. The Blue Devils are an appropriate starting point because their early riff arrangements prospered and refined themselves in later bands of Bennie Moten, Andy Kirk, Harlan Leonard and Jay McShann, above all in the Count Basie group. It all became Kansas City Style. The Blue Devils' best soloists defected to Kansas City's own Bennie Moten Orchestra in 1929–30, an aggregation inherited by Basie on Moten's death, a fact blithely unacknowledged in the movie.

During Prohibition and the depression, Kansas City was a provincial commercial center for whatever wheat and cattle shipped there more easily

than north to Chicago. (Blue Devils were wire cutters used on the barbed enclosures of cattle ranches). Under Tom Pendergast, Kansas City was wide open. The gambling, prostitution and booze meant employment in hard times for many midwest musicians, not only jazz-dance groups, but blues and boogie woogie pianists like Pete Johnson and blues shouters, most noteworthily Joe Turner. Together that pair worked the Sunset Club at Eighteenth and Highland, whose manager was Piney Brown.

Many of the great Kansas City figures are dead now: Lester Young and Charlie Parker, Lips Page and Walter Page, Bennie Moten, Charlie Christian, Pete Johnson and Jimmy Rushing. The others are getting on. A young man when he joined the Blue Devils, Basie was 73 at the time of this filming. The movie documents such survivors, their music and city, with great success.

The Last of the Blue Devils opens on a portion of *South,* Bennie Moten's Victor record success of 1928, and closes on that band's *Moten Swing,* which is a riffed revamping of *You're Driving Me Crazy* and a kind of KC theme song along with *Piney Brown Blues* and the *One O'Clock Jump.* Between these old recordings, live performance (filmed in 1974-75) and casual reminiscing interspersed with photographs and occasional quotations from old black-and-white movie footage.

If there is a motif to the film it is one of aging friends preserving other days in memory and performance. Episodes are structured around particular groups or personalities like Young, Parker, Walter Page and the Pendergast machine. Black Kansas City seems one vast neighborhood, at least by this version, and the musicians have all worked together, so the same figures reappear throughout. Most central are Joe Turner, Jessie Price (Basie's earliest drummer), Bill Basie, Buster Smith, and Ernie Williams (Blue Devils drummer, manager, "and the runner"). Although originating in Red Bank, New Jersey, Basie is clearly the home town boy who became famous. Turner (Big Joe Turner in *Shake, Rattle and Roll* days) grew up in the city's red light district, and epitomizes the local scene. Ailing, Turner sits throughout, but he is said to be in better health today. The live numbers begin with, "Well I've been to Kansas City/ Boy, and everything is really all right," Turner accompanied by Jay McShann.

Little quotations of early jazz film document some of its nicer moments. The Count does *Basie Boogie,* featuring himself much more than customary, and repeats it with a 1950 small group that affords momentary glimpses of Clark Terry and Wardell Gray. Lester has a chorus on Billy Holiday's *Fine and Mellow,* excerpted from "The Sound of Jazz," along with a snippet of *Dickie's Dream* with a dream band whose sax section, for instance, contains Young, Hawkins, Ben Webster, Earl Warren and Harry Carney! Especially for those who never saw him, a high point will be Charlie Parker, playing *Hot House* with Dizzy Gillespie. The tune was a bebop anthem, based on chords of *What is This Thing Called Love?* Their rendition stems from a fifties kinescope of a local New York show on an occasion when Earl Wilson presented an award to the pair. Barring photographs, it seems to be the only visible Bird in existence, although rumors speak of silent footage.

Except for the Pendergast sequence, white faces are notably absent from *The Last of the Blue Devils.* There is Butch Miles, Basie's drummer for years, and one can catch an instant of Buddy DeFranco beside Wardell Gray and Clark Terry. One club owner, Milton Morris, is interviewed. He ran the Novelty Club, once boasting a band that included Basie, Jo Jones, Lester Young, Lips Page and Walter Page—with Ben Webster and Charlie Parker sitting in. Morris applauds the music and its times. What he does not mention is that salaries were $3 a night, and Parker and Webster worked for free drinks, but such a scale was common.

Even beyond what is recounted, the film unleashes torrents of memories. Jimmy Forrest, recently deceased, plays *Night Train,* which he carted away from Ellington's *Happy Go Lucky Local* when he left the Duke's band. Paul Quinichette, once known as the Vice Prez in deference to Young, honks a Lester chorus at its raunchiest. Eddie Durham, who pioneered the electric guitar and introduced it to Charlie Christian in 1937, plays a ripping trombone solo which reminds the listener that the styles of Dickie Wells and Vic Dickenson were quite as geographic as they were personal in origin.

Crook Goodwin croons *Until the Real Thing Comes Along* in the tenor ballad style perfected by Pha Terrill with Andy Kirk and his Clouds of

Joy, still edged slightly with satire of contemporary dance band sentimentalities. White-moustached, Gene Ramey appears, a figure out of the past who was Parker's close friend since the days of Jay McShann. One musical highspot is a violin solo by Claude Williams, who accompanied Basie's first great band to New York. Tap dancer Speedy Huggins reminds the viewer of another rich tradition with names like Honey Coles, John Bubbles, and Bill Robinson. Jo Jones, who seems to have been in every first-rate jazz film ever made, contributes one of his inimitable imitations, here of Baby Lovett, and then the two duet. No mention is made of a moment, famed in Kansas City legend, when Jones threw his cymbal across the room, enraged at young Charlie Parker's incompetence during a jam session.

One of the most moving sequences follows Ernie Williams down Kansas City streets, talking about his neighborhood and waving to friends in a restaurant and a barber shop. The final sense one carries from this film is marked by the affection shared among these aging musicians whose warmth is genuine regardless of success or failure. These men lived through great times and preserved precious feelings in order to impart them, while enduring the cruel American entertainment business. One of their most-repeated observations is that some friend, now gone, was "a warm, good man." The movie could not have been made unless such emotions were shared among film-makers and performers.

—JOHN FELL

THE TREE OF WOODEN CLOGS

(L'Albero degli zoccoli) Written, directed, and photographed by Olmanno Olmi. New Yorker Films.

L'Albero degli Zoccoli (The Tree of Wooden Clogs) is a 185-minute feature film written, directed, photographed and edited by the Italian director Ermanno Olmi. When it premiered at Cannes, critical opinion was unanimously favorable and it won the coveted Golden Palm Award. But the film's release in the United States met with a mixed reception from critics who generally fell into two camps: those who objected strongly to its lack of conventional dramatic appeal, and those who, forgiving the absence of convention, have concluded that this film may be a "masterpiece" of the neorealist school of film-making.[1] In my view, Olmi creates what may well be a new style of film-making, a "post-neorealism" scrupulously faithful to the tenets of neorealism but at the same time intensely personal.

The Tree of Wooden Clogs documents the lives of five peasant families in an Italian village, not far from Milan, at the turn of the century. The film recalls Olmi's childhood in the Bergamo countryside. Olmi admits that "the film is really a story of my childhood, stories that have long lived in my memory crying to be told."[2] His grandmother, in particular, had a strong influence on him: "I spent many years living with my grandmother, a peasant woman of great wisdom (not scholastic wisdom, but the fruit of a life lived with utter clear-sightedness). As a result, I feel a great deal of tenderness toward such old sages."[3] The film presents an almost documentary panorama of the work, struggles, faith and love of the peasant people.

The Tree of Wooden Clogs is Olmi's ninth feature film in 20 years of writing and directing and it shares many traits with his earlier work. But it also represents a significant evolution. Its documentary aspect can be traced to Olmi's beginnings as an industrial film-maker: "I began by taking pictures of objects and people sheerly for the love of them. Shooting these pictures also was a way of coming closer to the world of work that I shared with my colleagues. Then I started making documentaries.[4] Between 1953 and 1961 Olmi made 40 documentary films, and his first dramatic feature, *Time Stood Still* (1959), was an expanded version of a documentary project.

His earliest feature films, like his latest one, graphically depict working-class life. *Time Stood Still, The Sound of Trumpets* (1961), and *The Fiancés* (1962) all deal with working-class people in contemporary society. Shot with a stark simplicity, these films, like *The Tree of Wooden Clogs,* pay careful attention to physical details and complete naturalness of performance, utilize deep-focus and a hand-held camera, and avoid conventional narrative structure in favor of a low-key, episodic flow which presents key moments in the lives of the characters. The themes Olmi deals with in these earlier films include personal freedom, maturity, human responsibility, the meaning of love.

Joy, still edged slightly with satire of contemporary dance band sentimentalities. White-moustached, Gene Ramey appears, a figure out of the past who was Parker's close friend since the days of Jay McShann. One musical highspot is a violin solo by Claude Williams, who accompanied Basie's first great band to New York. Tap dancer Speedy Huggins reminds the viewer of another rich tradition with names like Honey Coles, John Bubbles, and Bill Robinson. Jo Jones, who seems to have been in every first-rate jazz film ever made, contributes one of his inimitable imitations, here of Baby Lovett, and then the two duet. No mention is made of a moment, famed in Kansas City legend, when Jones threw his cymbal across the room, enraged at young Charlie Parker's incompetence during a jam session.

One of the most moving sequences follows Ernie Williams down Kansas City streets, talking about his neighborhood and waving to friends in a restaurant and a barber shop. The final sense one carries from this film is marked by the affection shared among these aging musicians whose warmth is genuine regardless of success or failure. These men lived through great times and preserved precious feelings in order to impart them, while enduring the cruel American entertainment business. One of their most-repeated observations is that some friend, now gone, was "a warm, good man." The movie could not have been made unless such emotions were shared among film-makers and performers.

—JOHN FELL

THE TREE OF WOODEN CLOGS

(L'Albero degli zoccoli) Written, directed, and photographed by Olmanno Olmi. New Yorker Films.

L'Albero degli Zoccoli (The Tree of Wooden Clogs) is a 185-minute feature film written, directed, photographed and edited by the Italian director Ermanno Olmi. When it premiered at Cannes, critical opinion was unanimously favorable and it won the coveted Golden Palm Award. But the film's release in the United States met with a mixed reception from critics who generally fell into two camps: those who objected strongly to its lack of conventional dramatic appeal, and those who, forgiving the absence of convention, have concluded that this film may be a "masterpiece" of the neorealist school of film-making.[1] In my view, Olmi creates what may well be a new style of film-making, a "post-neorealism" scrupulously faithful to the tenets of neorealism but at the same time intensely personal.

The Tree of Wooden Clogs documents the lives of five peasant families in an Italian village, not far from Milan, at the turn of the century. The film recalls Olmi's childhood in the Bergamo countryside. Olmi admits that "the film is really a story of my childhood, stories that have long lived in my memory crying to be told."[2] His grandmother, in particular, had a strong influence on him: "I spent many years living with my grandmother, a peasant woman of great wisdom (not scholastic wisdom, but the fruit of a life lived with utter clear-sightedness). As a result, I feel a great deal of tenderness toward such old sages."[3] The film presents an almost documentary panorama of the work, struggles, faith and love of the peasant people.

The Tree of Wooden Clogs is Olmi's ninth feature film in 20 years of writing and directing and it shares many traits with his earlier work. But it also represents a significant evolution. Its documentary aspect can be traced to Olmi's beginnings as an industrial film-maker: "I began by taking pictures of objects and people sheerly for the love of them. Shooting these pictures also was a way of coming closer to the world of work that I shared with my colleagues. Then I started making documentaries.[4] Between 1953 and 1961 Olmi made 40 documentary films, and his first dramatic feature, *Time Stood Still* (1959), was an expanded version of a documentary project.

His earliest feature films, like his latest one, graphically depict working-class life. *Time Stood Still, The Sound of Trumpets* (1961), and *The Fiancés* (1962) all deal with working-class people in contemporary society. Shot with a stark simplicity, these films, like *The Tree of Wooden Clogs,* pay careful attention to physical details and complete naturalness of performance, utilize deep-focus and a hand-held camera, and avoid conventional narrative structure in favor of a low-key, episodic flow which presents key moments in the lives of the characters. The themes Olmi deals with in these earlier films include personal freedom, maturity, human responsibility, the meaning of love.

A good example of this earlier group is *The Fiancés,* the story of a couple from a rural village who are engaged to be married, but who have difficulty communicating. The young man leaves the girl to take a job at a factory in an industrial town, but the real reason is to avoid the discomfort of the relationship. Through letters they learn to express themselves to each other and, though separated by distance, they fall in love as if for the first time. The hesitant early relationship of the young couple who marry in *The Tree of Wooden Clogs* recalls the couple in the earlier film.

Olmi's later films, including *One Fine Day* (1968), *In the Summertime* (1971), and *The Circumstance* (1974) continue to explore the same human themes with a similar style of film-making, but Olmi's focus shifts from the working class to the bourgeoisie. *One Fine Day,* for example, is the story of an advertising executive who has mastered the art of manipulating the public, but who has refused to take responsibility for his personal life, his family relationships—until he is involved in a serious automobile accident and is forced, for the first time, to assume responsibility. Unlike Olmi's earlier work in black and white, these later films are shot in color and make cautious use of music.

In *The Tree of Wooden Clogs,* instead of exploring present realities, Olmi chooses to document the past as a source of human values. This direction was hinted at in his first film, *Time Stood Still,* when the character Natale eulogizes the past. The value of the past appears again in *In the Summertime,* whose hero is a man who lives by outmoded, chivalric values. In *The Scavengers,* Olmi's young protagonist is challenged by the wisdom of the past as a source of inspiration and values for human living: "To look back on our past means, above all, to understand whether we have progressed along a certain course, or whether we have let ourselves become so confused that we have lost the sense of our existence."[5]

In Olmi's latest film, pre-industrial agrarian life is the yardstick with which to measure technological society. This contrast between the two societies is implicit in every one of Olmi's films, and the chief difference between them is a question of responsibility.

> I'm not saying that technological society is bad; I'm saying that the men who formed it were irresponsible . . . Men have always understood that they must resolve certain problems: work, shelter, etc. So they produced a society rich in consumer goods. But men don't act the role of responsible protagonists of their own lives; rather they become passive—this is the problem. It's not that we have cars, refrigerators, and television sets; it's the way we use these things."

Olmi's comment sheds light on several episodes in *The Tree of Wooden Clogs.* The padrone is the first to introduce technology to the village, in the form of the recorded opera. At the sound, all work stops and the peasants stand, motionless, their traditional way of life paralyzed by the recorded sound. The effect on the padrone is that he will not deal with his work—he avoids his responsibility. Later, the padrone looks through a window at a scene of a piano recital. A passive observer, excluding himself, on the outside, he looks in on a recital of real, not recorded, music—a scene of warmth, reality and community. The window is almost like a media screen; in his passivity, watching, he fails to take responsibility for participating.

Human responsibility is a major theme Olmi keeps returning to in his films. The male protagonist of *The Fiancés* evades responsibility in his relationship by leaving to work in a factory. But as Olmi points out, when the film ends "he no longer hides from her behind the excuse of money. He makes his most beautiful declaration of love; he says, 'Today I won't go to work.' "[7] When the main character of *The Sound of Trumpets* achieves his goal of working at a particular desk in the office, he must then choose whether to take responsibility for his life, or whether to allow himself to become a cog in the wheel of the company. *The Scavengers* deals with the fixation on the postwar obsession with material reconstruction. Instead of moving beyond it, "We do not act from conscience. We are like students who refuse to graduate. Our society wants to remain infantile."[8]

The Tree of Wooden Clogs opens with a question of responsibility. Batisti and his wife are charged by the priest with the responsibility of developing their little son Minek's gifts by giving him an education. Batisti does not relish the responsibility, but he accepts it. And at the end he risks chopping down the padrone's tree to carve the clog Minek needs to walk to school. When the padrone discovers the damage, Batisti and his family—despite the injustice—accept the consequences because Batisti accepts full responsibility for his actions. In a sense, social injustice is not the point: the power of the final scene is not so much the injustice of it as the realization, shared

by *all* the peasants watching Batisti's departing lantern, that responsibility is paramount for the dignity of human existence.

This point is also poignantly illustrated when the widow Runk has the opportunity to send her youngest children to the orphanage. She is attracted by the chance to be relieved of some of her heavy burden. Her son, however, chooses to retain the responsibility of keeping the family together, "even if I have to work day and night. We will stay together."

Old characters as sources of wisdom continually reappear in Olmi's films. As he stated in an interview in 1971, "The most regrettable flaw in modern society is its separation between old and young. We adults spend our lives entirely among the efficient, whereas the old and very young have time for reflection and contemplation."[9] It is the grandfather who knows the wisdom of how to grow tomatoes bigger and sooner than anyone else; and the little girl who is capable of learning this wisdom.

Olmi also believes that "crazy people will save mankind. I am not talking about pathological cases, of course, but those who see more profoundly than the sane . . ."[10] Thus the main character of *In the Summertime* is a "crazy" professor whom no one listens to, and the half-wit of *The Tree of Wooden Clogs* is received with reverence by the peasant families. It is interesting that the half-wit, on entering a house, goes first to the religious shrine of the household and leads the family into a prayerful renewal of religious faith. He acts almost as a priest.

The primacy of religious faith is a theme which represents an advancement, a development over Olmi's earlier work. It is a theme not explored in depth earlier, with the exception of *A Man Named John* (1965), a biography of Pope John XXIII, which Olmi considered his worst mistake. In his fictional films, however, the theme is not explored in depth.

The faith of the widow Runk brings about the miraculous cure of her cow; her faith is contrasted to the authoritative but erroneous advice of the veterinarian who represents the "wisdom" of technological society. The priest has the wisdom to see that Minek is gifted, and should receive an education; he exhorts his people to responsibility gently, and with a sense of humor. "Be careful that you do not end up like that," he warns the slaughterers of the pig.

For the first time in his films, Olmi explains the importance of religious faith: that it is the foundation for a practical, caring love—and it is this love that creates the *real* miracles, the real manifestations of God's love in life: the care of the peasant woman (and not a professional midwife) is what brings about the miracle of new birth for Batisti's wife, and even the care of the sign-lady—for all its ridiculous manifestations—leads her to give the old man the perfect advice for his affliction. Even the miracles of married love and procreation are presented unconventionally in a context of responsible caring. The newly married couple spend their wedding night in a convent under the generous care of nuns. The next day the sisters invite the couple to adopt and care for a beautiful orphaned infant. "He will bring his reward," the sisters promise. As the priest almost too explicitly explains to his congregation on the occasion of recalling the miracle of the sword and helmet, "To receive God's love, we need to love one another."

That faith and love are the key issues in Olmi's developing work is confirmed by his recent remarks concerning his next film, which "will be on a religious theme, not of man's relation to God but his relation to other human beings. It is the religiosity of people who are about to fall in love but have not yet found the right person to fall in love with."[11]

The critic Ying Ying Wu has commented that Ermanno Olmi "is one of the few Italian directors who has remained faithful to the mission of neorealism . . ."[12] The fundamental feature of neorealist cinema, according to Bazin, is spatial reality and Olmi achieves this reality through the use of deep focus. In this way *The Tree of Wooden Clogs* communicates the extent of the fields, the shape of the rooms, the texture of the wood and cloth. The film offers "a cinema of silences and glances whose power comes from the image alone, rather than from words or dramatic effects."[13] Olmi also fulfills in this film another of Bazin's precepts: "to seek and present the significance one finds in objects by means of the objects concerned rather than by using these objects to body forth an idea not already implicit in them."[14]

The raw material Olmi worked with was, as far as possible, reality itself. He spent several months in a village interviewing over 2,000 peasants to cast *The Tree of Wooden Clogs.* Instead of using a

script, he based the film on a dialogue with the actors preceding each shooting, incorporating their real-life experiences as much as possible. The nonprofessional "does not have to pretend to be someone else. He is already by nature the person in question and he reacts with the typical instincts I am trying to portray."[15] Olmi's practice of casting nonprofessional actors for the sake of greater reality is common to all his earlier films, with the exception of *A Man Named John* (which starred Rod Steiger).

But as Bazin pointed out, a realist approach does not preclude a distinctive style or a filmmaker's control over the selection of either the plastic image, or the montage by which the images themselves are selected and presented through editing. Olmi carefully controls the color, for example, to suggest throughout the simplicity and earthiness of the peasants' life: browns and greys predominate, and the lighting makes use of heavy shadows. Important relationships between objects are established within a single wide shot. For example, the dark clouds hanging over the village signify the approaching storm; but the image is almost identical to the cloud of smoke hanging over the boat carrying the young couple down the river into Milan—smoke from a fire started by rioting revolutionaries. The iconic meaning of each separate image is clear, but by juxtaposing editorially the two similar cloud images, Olmi makes them symbolic not arbitrarily, but so that both the storm and the cloud of smoke draw meaning from each other: the storm hovers over the village like the social turmoil of the century to come, and the smoke signals not only an isolated fire, but the storm of approaching national revolution. Indeed, throughout the film each carefully selected image of reality becomes a metaphor arising "from reality itself" and commenting on the total reality. In a way which Bazin would have appreciated, Olmi's impirical reality contains correspondences and interrelationships which the camera can find."[16]

Olmi also satisfies another of Bazin's criteria for neorealism through his editing approach. Montage is employed to preserve the spatial reality of each scene, but gently directs attention to details which otherwise might be overlooked. For example, in the scene in which Minek helps his father by holding the sack while Batisti shovels it full of heavy grain, a close shot directs our attention to his frailty, and the spontaneous way he tries to keep his balance, but can't. The montage reveals not only a closer look at the real situation, but in the light of the opening scene suggest the fragile quality of Minek's sensitivity and intellectual gifts which would motivate the village priest to suggest that he, though a peasant, should receive an education. The shot, in turn, becomes symbolic of the entire relationship between technological intellect and the rough and simple truths which jar our educated serenity.

Other major neorealist directors have presented the working class as driven by poverty and oppression: an unfree class, determined by social and economic pressures. Olmi, on the other hand, sees poverty as a condition of mankind in which the real potentials of the human person are by necessity brought to the surface. He does not refrain from commenting on the injustices of society, as the conclusion of *The Tree of Wooden Clogs* makes clear; but this injustice is subordinated to questions of responsibility which face every human person, no matter how oppressed.

—MICHAEL B. GLADYCH

The Cinematic Apparatus

edited by Teresa de Lauretis and Stephen Heath

The fourteen essays prepared for this volume investigate the relationship between the technical and social elements of cinema. The complex interaction between meaning and technological method is a characteristic unique to this art form, and *The Cinematic Apparatus* deals systematically with each major question raised by this relationship. Specific topics treated within this overall framework include technology and ideology in film, color, animation and the perception of motion, avant-garde practice and technological determinations, and the implications of questions posed by radical feminist critiques of contemporary film.

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NOTES

1. Vincent Canby, *The New York Times*, June 1, 1979, p. C-8.
2. Ermanno Olmi, *Newsweek*, June 4, 1979.
3. Ermanno Olmi, in an interview with Charles Samuels, *Encountering Directors* (New York, 1972), p. 109.
4. Olmi, in Samuels, p. 100.
5. Ying Ying Wu, *Filmex Catalog* (1979), p. 36.
6. Olmi, in Samuels, p. 104.
7. Olmi, in Samuels, p. 106.
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9. Olmi, in Samuels, p. 109.
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16. Andrew, p. 155.
17. Olmi, *Newsweek*, June 4, 1979.

Books

THE INQUISITION IN HOLLYWOOD
Politics in the Film Community 1930-1960

By Larry Ceplair and Steven Englund. Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1980, $17.50

Before you read this review, I owe you my discount rate: From 1940 to 1948 I worked in Hollywood in various minor positions (from company clerk to personal assistant to Fritz Lang.) For three to four years I belonged to branches of the Hollywood section of the Communist Party, including the year 1947. I knew personally (some well, some slightly) most of the people involved in the events in this book. I did the bulk of the research about the House Un-American Activities Committee and its members for the original "Hollywood 19," before they went to the 1947 hearings in Washington. I was deeply involved in organizing conferences, meetings, and broadcasts around the issue, and kept materials relating to it. After 1948 I could not find employment in the studios any more. In 1951 I began teaching film at the University of Southern California. Its administration was fully informed of my past. However, I was dismissed from USC after I refused to name names before a HUAC hearing in 1955. Over the years I have collected and studied everything I could lay my hands on about blacklisting. This eventually developed into a course I have been teaching under the title, "The Hollywood Blacklist: Causes and Consequences." Whether this background disqualifies or qualifies me to express my opinions of this book, I leave for you to decide.

Generally speaking, I find this a superlative account of a much-treated and mistreated momentous event in recent American history. It is not the definitive book (and the authors make no such claim), but is clearly the most comprehensive, evenhanded and lucid scrutiny of the politics of Hollywood, which lie at the roots of the later, more publicized personal and social disasters.

Ceplair and Englund are young historians. They were either barely or not yet born when the story they tell and analyze took place. This gives them a unique point of view. They had access to a wealth of private papers that only recently have become available at several special collections and archives, especially those at the Wisconsin Center for Theater Research and at other universities and institutions. They interviewed extensively 70 people, who were intimately involved. They seem to have read virtually everything that was printed on the matter, including years of trade papers, and also short-lived, forgotten periodicals. Knowing the field, I cannot imagine more exhaustive research.

The result is the first genuinely scholarly work on the subject. The authors' sympathetic interpretation of certain aspects of it is as well documented and reasoned as is their pointed criticism of others. The book gives a fresh, believable perspective on a series of occurrences I thought I knew; it offers a wealth of clarification. It disentangles the multitude of Hollywood's frequently overlapping organizations, and gives each of them succinctly its proper due.

The main distinguishing feature of this book is its methodical, historical approach. It takes until page 254 (out of a total of 425) until the hearings of October 1947 are treated. It is made abundantly clear that these hearings were not a sudden whim of the Committee, nor was Hollywood selected as its first target solely because that peculiar community would yield more publicity. This is crucial

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to understanding this blacklist, and possibly others to come.

Ceplair and Englund make a—to me—undeniable case for the proposition that the roots of the blacklist lie in the decades-long struggle for the control of the screen. The producers did not want to share the immense profits, improve working conditions, accept any kind of collaboration with the creators of the actual films. It should not be forgotten that Los Angeles was a notoriously open-shop town. So it is not surprising that this struggle eventually culminated in an attack on the guilds, and especially on the Screen Writers Guild.

After the introduction of sound, screenwriters became central in Hollywood. They were latecomers, and they were different. The authors claim, and I think rightly, that they were "generally more intelligent, educated and literate." They received little respect, and were outrageously exploited, except for a small body of elderly producers' pets. No wonder many of them turned to unionization. And the complicated story of the establishment of the Screen Writers Guild, by itself, makes the book required for any scholar of the Hollywood film industry. Convoluted events, involving many people and interests, are made clear for the first time. While the other guilds had problems, most of the conservative producer-oriented attacks were targeted on the screenwriters. (Of the original Hollywood 19 who were subpoenaed in 1947, 16 were or had been writers.)

The book is full of little-known facts and sensible insights. For instance, how many know that the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences was founded as a company union, and for the first six years of its existence served as a device to prevent actors, directors, and screenwriters from organizing? It did not work. After the constitutionality of the Wagner Act was upheld, the Screen Writers Guild was formally certified as sole bargaining agent in 1938 and signed its first contract in May, 1941.

The book's treatment of the Communist Party in Hollywood is factual, critical, and fair, at least to this former member. The authors understand the Party's basic appeal during the Depression, when its position coincided with many anti-Nazi and pro-New Deal activities. They recognize the differences between Hollywood and other Party branches, and the constant contradictions between what Hollywood communists did and what they believed. As the authors put it, ". . . writing of a financially successful script and the political goal of changing society were incompatible." Probably the reason why no evidence of Communist ideas was ever found in a Hollywood film.

But the key and undeniable criticism of the Hollywood communists is their uncritical, unflinching inflexible support of the Soviet Union through the Soviet trials of the thirties, the Nazi-Soviet Pact of 1939, the invasion of Finland, etc. I still feel ashamed of that even though I can remember all our rationalizations. The authors are correct when they conclude that through this consistent behavior the Hollywood communists "left themselves open to the justifiable suspicion that they not only approved of everything they were defending, but would themselves act in the same way if they were in the same position." The inevitable result was the destruction of the anti-Fascist Popular Front, the emergence of liberal anti-Communism, the subsequent isolation of the Party in Hollywood and its related immensely increased vulnerability, which gave HUAC's Trojan horse in the studios (the Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals) the opportunity to lay the groundwork for the decisive attack on Hollywood in the fall of 1947.

"The question of Communism is in no way related to this inquiry," John Howard Lawson told the House Committee. It *was* related, but only peripherally and primarily as a convenient excuse in those Cold War years. The real issue was, indeed, as Lawson continued, "an attempt to get control of the screen." That was stated most clearly by William Wyler in the first nationwide broadcast by the Committee for the First Amendment on October 26, 1947: "I'm convinced I would not be allowed to make *The Best Years of Our Lives* as it was made a year ago. This is directly the result of the Un-American Activities Committee. They are making decent people afraid to express their opinions. They are creating fear in Hollywood. Fear will result in self-censorship. Self-censorship will paralyze the screen. And in the last analysis you will suffer. You will be deprived of entertainment which stimulates you, and you will be given a diet of pictures which conform to some people's arbitrary standards of entertainment and Americanism."

That is exactly what happened. Just compare the films the prophetic Wyler made before and after 1947. This applied generally. Anything controversial, "social," or dealing with actual American concerns was out. The blacklist had a profoundly intimidating effect on those not blacklisted. The American public, for virtually two decades, was deprived of pertinent, thought-provoking movies. As the authors write, "The studios took giant steps backward in their depiction of women, war crimes and government on film . . . [coupled with] the near complete exclusion of the poor, workers, blacks and minorities . . ." The United States disappeared from American screens, and increasingly great films began to come from Italy, France, Japan, and Sweden where film-makers were not afraid to deal truthfully and movingly with all aspects of their own countries. Here is a fertile field for research: the content and style of Hollywood movies before and after the blacklist. (And also the still lingering effect of the blacklist on television—both started at the same time.)

I myself wonder whether this profoundly chilling effect, which kept the real USA hidden from us, which slowly distorted our perceptions and trivialized our attention, was not highly instrumental in creating the atmosphere that tolerated Nixon, Vietnam, and all the events which culminated in the excesses of the FBI and finally Watergate.

Without sacrificing one whit of their sound scholarship, the authors have written a very accessible, readable book, which ought to be read by anyone seriously interested in film. They will learn systematically and entertainingly all the pertinent details of this frightening period in recent American history, not just about the blacklist, but the blackmarket, the repulsive "clearance" business, vignettes of the lives of main characters, why certain legal positions were taken, etc.

One last point concerning Dalton Trumbo's view that both the blacklisted and the informers were "only victims." I basically agree with Albert Maltz's immediate attack on this attitude, but I was never happy with the word "victim," since I never felt like one. I prefer the authors' word "defeated." We chose our position voluntarily, we resisted, and we were beaten with all the consequences thereof.

On the other hand, I will always refuse to be put in the same category with people like the former comrade who said: "I don't think . . . that any individual can indulge himself in the luxury of individual morality . . .", or with the other former comrade and friend who drove up in his Cadillac convertible with the top down, and screamed to a group of people participating in a nightlong vigil on the eve of the Rosenbergs' execution: "They're going to fry you Commie bastards, too."

—ANDRIES DEINUM

Controversy and Correspondence

SHARPENING DEEP FOCUS

Charles Harpole's article "Ideological and Technological Determinism in Deep Space Cinema Images: Issues in Ideology, Technological History, and Aesthetics," [*FQ*, Spring 1980] is an interesting but flawed re-examination of an important historical, theoretical and critical problem. While it is good to see a continuing analysis of the problem of "deep focus," Harpole's study can be accused of the determinism he deplores. In fact, Harpole's analysis of deep focus and Comolli's work does not go far enough to distinguish the difference between aesthetic history, and a materialist or ideological analysis.

The first and most obvious problem for Harpole is that he does not challenge the definition of deep focus in any systematic fashion. He claims that "spectators perceive films with the same physiological and psychological equipment with which they perceive real life." What he doesn't add is that it happens to be a simple fact that the human eye *does not see* in deep focus.

Deep focus is produced by a lens and a lens does not reproduce "real life" the way the eye does. Film viewing is not simply analogous to perceiving "real life." This is a crucial point. People do not and cannot see or experience close-ups and long shots at the same time. Look up from this page and check it out. Place one hand a foot away from your face. Focus on an object twenty feet behind the hand. Now try to bring the hand and the other object into sharp focus at the same time. It can't be done. Deep focus is an illusion as far as normal perception is concerned. This fact may allow us to place deep focus as a problem that is similar to our concerns

That is exactly what happened. Just compare the films the prophetic Wyler made before and after 1947. This applied generally. Anything controversial, "social," or dealing with actual American concerns was out. The blacklist had a profoundly intimidating effect on those not blacklisted. The American public, for virtually two decades, was deprived of pertinent, thought-provoking movies. As the authors write, "The studios took giant steps backward in their depiction of women, war crimes and government on film . . . [coupled with] the near complete exclusion of the poor, workers, blacks and minorities . . ." The United States disappeared from American screens, and increasingly great films began to come from Italy, France, Japan, and Sweden where film-makers were not afraid to deal truthfully and movingly with all aspects of their own countries. Here is a fertile field for research: the content and style of Hollywood movies before and after the blacklist. (And also the still lingering effect of the blacklist on television—both started at the same time.)

I myself wonder whether this profoundly chilling effect, which kept the real USA hidden from us, which slowly distorted our perceptions and trivialized our attention, was not highly instrumental in creating the atmosphere that tolerated Nixon, Vietnam, and all the events which culminated in the excesses of the FBI and finally Watergate.

Without sacrificing one whit of their sound scholarship, the authors have written a very accessible, readable book, which ought to be read by anyone seriously interested in film. They will learn systematically and entertainingly all the pertinent details of this frightening period in recent American history, not just about the blacklist, but the blackmarket, the repulsive "clearance" business, vignettes of the lives of main characters, why certain legal positions were taken, etc.

One last point concerning Dalton Trumbo's view that both the blacklisted and the informers were "only victims." I basically agree with Albert Maltz's immediate attack on this attitude, but I was never happy with the word "victim," since I never felt like one. I prefer the authors' word "defeated." We chose our position voluntarily, we resisted, and we were beaten with all the consequences thereof.

On the other hand, I will always refuse to be put in the same category with people like the former comrade who said: "I don't think . . . that any individual can indulge himself in the luxury of individual morality . . .", or with the other former comrade and friend who drove up in his Cadillac convertible with the top down, and screamed to a group of people participating in a nightlong vigil on the eve of the Rosenbergs' execution: "They're going to fry you Commie bastards, too."

—ANDRIES DEINUM

Controversy and Correspondence

SHARPENING DEEP FOCUS

Charles Harpole's article "Ideological and Technological Determinism in Deep Space Cinema Images: Issues in Ideology, Technological History, and Aesthetics," [*FQ*, Spring 1980] is an interesting but flawed re-examination of an important historical, theoretical and critical problem. While it is good to see a continuing analysis of the problem of "deep focus," Harpole's study can be accused of the determinism he deplores. In fact, Harpole's analysis of deep focus and Comolli's work does not go far enough to distinguish the difference between aesthetic history, and a materialist or ideological analysis.

The first and most obvious problem for Harpole is that he does not challenge the definition of deep focus in any systematic fashion. He claims that "spectators perceive films with the same physiological and psychological equipment with which they perceive real life." What he doesn't add is that it happens to be a simple fact that the human eye *does not see* in deep focus.

Deep focus is produced by a lens and a lens does not reproduce "real life" the way the eye does. Film viewing is not simply analogous to perceiving "real life." This is a crucial point. People do not and cannot see or experience close-ups and long shots at the same time. Look up from this page and check it out. Place one hand a foot away from your face. Focus on an object twenty feet behind the hand. Now try to bring the hand and the other object into sharp focus at the same time. It can't be done. Deep focus is an illusion as far as normal perception is concerned. This fact may allow us to place deep focus as a problem that is similar to our concerns

with processes like Cinemascope. With Cinemascope we are concerned with not being able to take everything in at the same time across the width of the screen. The problems are similar and Harpole's attempt to mystify deep focus will not change that fact.

Harpole is also mistaken when he concludes that Comolli's work rests in the realm of the ideological and economic alone. This is a grave misreading, because Comolli is concerned with aesthetics in very perceptive ways. His linking the 350-year-old tradition of Quattrocentro perspective to the development of cinema technology points this out. Harpole is guilty of making omissions that allow him to cover ground that Comolli has supposedly not analyzed. This just isn't the case. Comolli's critique of Bazin discusses the traditions of aesthetic theory that allowed deep focus formulations to take place in the ways that they did. Comolli is sensitive to Bazin's contributions, but he makes a strong case for why certain misconceptions about cinema "language" were so easily accepted.

Another problem that Harpole does not examine is the idea of space as opposed to time in any theory of deep focus. Bazin felt that the long take in deep focus preserved space *and* time, but it is clear that time is neglected in favor of space. Deep focus may not fragment space, but it certainly subjects space to time in a way that is parallel to subjecting metaphor to metonomy. Montage can often show simultaneous action in two different spaces, in this way altering time by giving space its due by refusing to be limited to a single point of view (and POV is vital to a discussion of the overall rhetorical strategies of particular film narratives). Deep focus can be seen as something that emphasizes metonomy over metaphor, while montage tends to subject metonomy to metaphor.

By refusing to discuss some of the problems that I have laid out above, Harpole's aesthetically based history is just as biased as Bazin's, Ogle's, or Comolli's. Without questioning his own theory's mode or method of operation Harpole cannot produce significant knowledge about the area he is covering. By never approaching the problem of time in relation to deep focus, Harpole reveals some of his own biases in the area of narrative construction. The mere mentioning of narrative codes will not suffice. Nor is it enough simply to come up with new films that displayed great depth of field. Wouldn't it be just as easy to show how certain film-makers consciously attempted to *reduce* depth of field that "naturally" appeared in order to create a particular kind of narrative? The work of Frank Borzage in the 1920's would be an example of this. Enforced shallow focus is just as artificial as deep focus and points out ways that deep focus or depth of field was limiting film-makers' choices, as much as it supposedly expanded them.

There is also the problem of Harpole falling back on the myth of origins in his uncovering of new films that display deep focus techniques in narrative construction. Having studied the problem of deep focus for some time I can add many films that Harpole has not yet seen that will contribute to his history. But I have no interest in marking off "phases in the evolution of depth compositional style," and judging from many of the films that I will mention, it is puzzling why Harpole finds phase marking important at all. Such attempts to find first cause deny a number of important historical points, the most important of which is the problem of lost films. It is a fallacy, at this point in time, to trouble oneself with the task of finding firsts, because once that is done there is supposedly no need to look further for particular kinds of information that would expand, rather than contract/crystallize, an historical moment or period.

A discussion of Méliès and his connection with Renaissance theater sets that displayed a geometric perspective aesthetic is vital to Harpole's discussion, but it doesn't seem to find its way into his essay. Harpole finds time to mention Lumière, but it is obvious that the problem of depth and narrative construction was a major concern to Méliès. This type of omission is another example of a film historian/theorist obeying the fallacious and artificial distinction between Lumière/Méliès traditions of film-making. These traditions supposedly mark off two impulses of film-making, impulses that supposedly never intersect in fact, fancy, or history. This denigrates Méliès's contributions to film-making, especially in the area of producing multiple-plane action in order to create narratives. Until Méliès's work is examined in more detail, the history of deep focus will never really begin. Another film-maker who is given little attention by Harpole is D. W. Griffith. A cursory examination of Griffith's shorts would reveal a number of films where deep focus narrative construction appeared. Some of these films are *The Lonely Villa* (1909), *Ramona* (1910), *The Massacre* (1912), and *New York Hat* (1912). It must also be pointed out that film critics were writing about these effects as early as 1910. George Pratt's *Spellbound in Darkness* is an important work for this kind of information.

While Harpole briefly mentions Thomas Ince (who continues to be one of the most neglected film-makers and producers of the early Hollywood period) he does so in a way that does not point out the director's contributions to the "evolution of depth compositional style." (It can even be argued that Ince did not direct *The Italian*, or *The Coward*. He just produced them.) Two of Ince's films, *Blazing the Trail* (April 15, 1912) and *The Bargain* (Dec. 1914), show how complex and seminal a contribution this film-maker/producer may be for Harpole's history. As a matter of fact, *Blazing the Trail* is the most impressive use of deep focus I have seen from this period and is one of the concrete examples

that blows Bazin's "Evolution of the Language of the Cinema" right out of the water.

Blazing the Trail uses some of the most sophisticated multiple-plane narrative action from the early film period. Using the natural depth achieved by outdoor photography, Ince staged action on two or three planes at one time. This construction created a narrative of stunning originality and complexity. Of the film's 43 shots, 23 are composed in depth, where multiple-plane action in foreground, midground, and background contribute to the story. The imaginative use of offscreen space also is employed and it is clear that Ince's film is one of the most sophisticated works that has ever employed deep focus as a narrative technique throughout the span of a whole film story. I find it to be one of the most important works in all of American film history.

The Bargain is a film that destroys many film historians' contentions about the use of natural space and surroundings in Hollywood Westerns. The attempts to reveal character within a forbidding natural environment did not start in the 20's or 30's. Griffith's *The Massacre* is just one example of an early film that attempted to produce such effects, but *The Bargain* is the most impressive film that I have been able to find that reveals the incredible use of outdoor locations to build a character's mood and motivation. *The Bargain's* use of natural depth is as impressive as any film made by John Ford and just points out, in another way, how difficult it becomes to make sweeping statements about film genres or traditions such as the Western. Film history isn't that cut or dried. I appreciate Harpole's use of Gomery to point out how much more work historians have to do before making generalizations about film, but it is clear that Harpole leans on facts that do not stand up to the test of original source material.

The films I have just described (in brief) should add information to Harpole's history. Hopefully some of these points will also help in the re-thinking of deep focus itself, since it appears that some of the debate over its very definition still seems to be in grave doubt.

—JOE HEUMANN

CHARLES HARPOLE REPLIES:—

Before responding point by point to Mr. Heumann's comments on my article on deep space images, let me say that I am pleased to find another person so passionately interested in this aspect of aesthetic history. I hope that, despite his excessively sharply worded phrasing, I have found another kindred spirit in this aspect of cinema study.

As to the first point, yes, "deep focus" is an "illusion as far as normal perception is concerned." Yes, current science reports that people actually see via a series of short, rapidly-changing "eye stops" in which the eye fixes, focuses on one point, sees, and then moves on to another "stop." But, the perception in the mind is one of a continuous, all-in-focus visual world, and what the eye really sees and what the brain is cognizant of are two different things. My point was simply that the appearance of the world that the brain is aware of corresponds closely with the *results* of the way the brain decodes and becomes aware when "reading" a film.

About the relationship between space and time in films, certainly the presentation of space in certain ways affects perception of time and certainly the reverse is also true. I made a strategic decision not to open this rather large issue in an article-length work and concentrated on the spatial dimension. The subject deserves at least a book which I think Mr. Heumann or I, or someone, should begin since the issue is more complicated than even he suggests in his brief letter. (And yes, I would be very happy to see a thorough work on the subject of purposefully reduced depth of field—another very interesting topic but one which in no way obviates my study.)

As for Méliès's contribution to depth presentations, I found that since the predominance of his action moves horizontally across the frame and that since he seemed to be "merely" referring to depth via stage-like backdrops and devices rather than creating a non-stage (or more cinematic) depth effect, he should be mostly excluded from the kind of treatment I did. I feel similarly about Ince. It is possible that I should further refine the extended definition of depth. That calls for more study and *another* article rather than the destruction of the existing one.

On the issue of D. W.Griffith and on Comolli, I must refer Mr. Heumann to my dissertation of deep space images, published by Arno Press, in which I devote extensive discussion to the work of Griffith and to an estimation of Comolli's serialized essays.

In sum, Mr. Heumann's critique is based on the complaint that not enough films are cited or that his favorites are slighted. (I can complain that God did not make enough days in the week.) The issue of completeness is a non-issue since the doing of history is an evolutionary, accumulative activity rather than one that "gets it right once for all time." That I neglected his favorites is true; I can only thank Mr. Heumann for adding to the strength of my case and for enlarging the compendium of "depth films."

I look forward to additional work from many people which will concentrate on this and other specific aesthetic and/or technological effects, trace the periodicity, and further enlarge our understanding of the film medium. I call upon and welcome Mr. Heumann's efforts in the work on these waiting jobs.

—CHARLES H. HARPOLE

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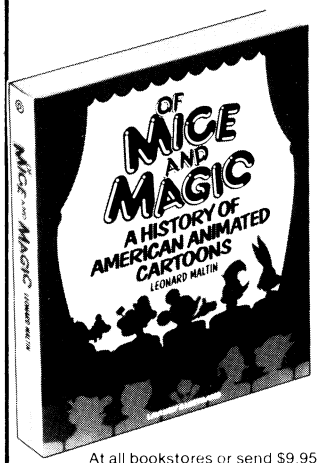

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